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V. P. Singh

India's Contribution to International Peace

Sitakant Mahapatra

*Men, Patterns of Moving Dust:
Oral Poetry of Indian Tribes*

Carla Petievich

The Feminine Voice in the Urdu Ghazal

Indra Nath Choudhuri

The Contemporary Bengali Scene

K. S. Duggal

Towards Integrating Science with Spirituality

Premendra Mitra

The Discovery of Telenapota

Lakshmi Kannan

Parijata

Vishwapriya L. Iyengar

The Last Frontier

Dhanraj Bhagat

Illustrations on pages 42, 56, 66, 107, 108

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India's Contribution to International Peace

V.P. Singh

Today the leaders and peoples of South Asia need to remind themselves of the imperatives of peace.* We are amongst the poorest regions of the world. We face formidable challenges of building our economies while reducing disparities and eliminating social injustices. We have many difficult miles to traverse in bringing the benefits of education and health care to all our people. Our basic goal must be an improvement in the quality of life of the poorest of our citizens. We can ill-afford to spend precious resources and energy in nurturing old antagonisms or seeking to derive advantage from each other's problems.

Profound and exciting changes are taking place across the world. Old divisions are breaking down. There is a transition from conflict and confrontation to consultation and cooperation. History will surely find us wanting if we, in South Asia, remain out of step with global trends towards dialogue, openness and cooperation.

India and her people want peace. While we are capable of meeting any conflict that is thrust upon us, we wish to work for enduring peace and prosperity, in our neighbourhood and across the world, paving the way for a new, better and more just tomorrow. This is what India has stood for and worked for. This is what India shall continue to work for in the future.

Peace can never be based on perpetuation of injustice and exploitation. A world in which the vast majority of people enjoyed neither political independence or civil rights or even control over their national resources, could never provide the basis of a durable peace. Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent struggle for India's freedom mobilised the Indian masses in a people's movement which led to the peaceful overthrow of colonial rule. India's independence was a turning point. It set in motion a chain of events leading to the irrevocable end of imperialism. Millions suffering under colonial rule in Asia, Africa,

* Based on the fourth Indira Gandhi Memorial Lecture.

Latin America and the Carribean drew inspiration from the Indian example. The newly independent Indian nation lent enthusiastic support to this process of decolonisation.

On March 21, this year, I had the privilege to participate in the historic ceremonies of Namibia's Independence. When freedom came to Africa's last colony I realised how far we have come in the last fifty years. Namibia's independence marked the culmination of a long struggle by the Namibian people under the leadership of SWAPO. It also marked the culmination of the struggle for decolonisation in Africa which had been set in motion by India's independence. For us in India, there was a sense of special satisfaction as we watched the Namibian flag unfurl over Windhoek. We had extended full support to the Namibian struggle since its inception. There were moments when the goal looked distant, but we had never flagged in our efforts to mobilise world opinion in support of the brave people of Namibia.

India's independence movement owed much to Gandhiji's experience of racial hatred and division in South Africa. It was there that he forged his strategy of non-cooperation and peaceful resistance, which he was later to use, so effectively, in the struggle for India's freedom. A system based on the systematic and institutionalised violation of human dignity is an affront to the world's conscience. India has been in the forefront of the struggle to end apartheid.

We were the first to raise this issue at the United Nations and among the first to impose a complete boycott of economic, political or diplomatic links with South Africa. It is a matter of immense satisfaction that signs of change are now visible in South Africa. We share in the world-wide rejoicing over the release of Nelson Mandela, the symbols of the struggle against apartheid and we now look forward to his visit to India. We will continue our efforts to maintain sustained international pressure on South Africa to bring about the early dismantling of apartheid.

There can be no lasting peace in West Asia without a just settlement of the issue of Palestine. The circumstances leading to the creation of Israel led to the displacement of millions of Palestinians from their homes. Virtually overnight they were turned into refugees. India has stood firmly with the Palestinians in their just struggle for a homeland of their own in a peaceful West Asia. We were among the first countries to recognise the State of Palestine last year. President Yasser Arafat, who was in India recently to receive the Jawaharlal Nehru Award, has made some bold concessions in the instersts of peace. Concerted pressure by the international community, is necessary to ensure that this historic opportunity for peace does not flounder on continued Israeli intransigence.

Peace cannot also be based on fear and hatred. Pandit Nehru was one of the first to realise the inherent limitations and dangers of a world divided by ideology and military alliances. Nehru's unique and most memorable contribution to the evolution of India's foreign policy was the concept of Non-alignment. He offered Non-alignment and its component concept of peaceful co-existence to a war-weary and ideologically divided world.

As the process of decolonisation gathered momentum and the concept of Non-alignment flowered into a movement, the validity of an alternative path in world affairs became a reality. India presented and promoted a vision of a world order based on anticolonialism, peaceful co-existence and non-violence, reflecting the philosophical and intellectual values of India's struggle for independence.

It was Jawaharlal Nehru's vision which infused India's foreign policy initiatives in early years of independence. We put across a point of view that sought peaceful co-existence and a determined search for negotiated political resolutions of conflict. This alternative path found expression in five principles of Panchsheel.

The five pillars of Panchsheel became the hallmark of our dedicated search for peace. Nehru's statesmanship and his global vision led to India's increasing involvement in world affairs. Whether it was the war in Korea or the conflict in Indo-China in the early fifties, the Suez or Cyprus problems, the participation in UN peace-keeping activities, India was called upon to play a moderating role.

The Cold War and policies of containment led to increasing tensions and conflicts in East and South-East Asia. The outbreak of hostilities in the Korean peninsula in 1950 posed a serious threat to peace. India's objective was to localise the conflict and to facilitate an early peaceful settlement.

India's approach to the problem throughout was not to press a solution by military means but to seek a negotiated political settlement. India's perception of the issues involved was finally accepted, but not before much blood had been shed. India played a leading role in the negotiations resulting in the cease-fire and the establishment of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission for repatriation of prisoners of war, of which India was the Chairman.

In Vietnam, India fully backed the challenge of the Vietnam Independence League to French colonialism. India supported the independence of the Indo-China States and directly contributed to the final outcome of the Geneva Conference. India also served as the Chairman of the International Control Commission to supervise the fulfilment of the 1954 Geneva Accord. The Commission fulfilled its mandate to oversee the withdrawal of foreign forces from Laos

and Cambodia as well as the elections which brought Prince Sihanouk to power. Clearly it was not the failure of the Commission but intervention from outside in Vietnam and foreign instigated coups in Cambodia which led to the region being engulfed in hostilities for decades. In 1980, we recognised the Heng Samrin Government in Cambodia.

Since then, we have actively participated in international efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the problem, including the International Conference on Cambodia in Paris in August in 1989. Peace in Indo-China is an important priority for stability and growth in the region. We will continue to engage ourselves in peace efforts that do not infringe the sovereignty of Cambodia, prevent the recurrence of the genocidal policies of an earlier regime and help towards ensuring a Nonaligned Cambodia, at peace with its neighbours and able to exercise fully its right to self-determination.

In suggesting a cooperative and peaceful alternative based on political independence and an acceptance of ideological diversity, our foreign policy has sought to project an alternative path away from confrontation and violence and from the dangerous doctrines of balance of power and mutual assured destruction. Ours has not been an idealistic pursuit of unattainable goals. Our foreign policy has been pragmatic. It has been based on a realistic understanding of the horrors of war and the imperative need for peace and disarmament as necessary pre-conditions to economic development and shared prosperity. This is reflected not only in our pursuit of peace and disarmament at a global level but also in the tangible agreements we have concluded to seek a peaceful resolution of conflicts in our own neighbourhood.

We attach great importance to the strengthening of the South-Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. The countries of South Asia must learn to work together and evolve a meaningful framework of regional cooperation. We cannot let false barriers create schisms between us. We cannot continue to take a rigid or narrow view of our common problems or seek solutions which fulfil the needs of only one country. There must be a healthy process of give and take and an effort to find solutions which contribute to the greatest good of the greatest number. We must learn to pool our talents and work for our collective prosperity. Only such an approach will enable us to meet the challenges that we face.

It was our concern for giving peace a real chance that led Indira Gandhi to seek a durable settlement with Pakistan after the liberation of Bangladesh: Indiraji's enlightened stand in Simla offered an honourable settlement to Pakistan. In the interests of longterm peace, Pakistan's concerns were taken fully into account. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, himself,

and the Pakistani Parliament hailed the Simla Agreement as a major diplomatic achievement. This Agreement has ensured nearly two decades of peace and stability between our two countries.

The Simla Agreement provides a viable framework for a durable peace. The Agreement commits the two countries to settle their differences by peaceful means, through bilateral negotiations without recourse to force. Indeed, bilateralism is the bedrock of the Agreement. Pending the final settlement of problems, both sides undertook not to unilaterally alter the situation. It also enshrined the principles of respect for each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Through the Simla Agreement, we agreed to create conditions that would permit India and Pakistan to co-exist peacefully and promote stability and mutual prosperity. It is our sincere hope that good sense will prevail and that the Simla Agreement will be honoured, in letter and spirit. This will be in the interest of our two countries and for the cause of regional peace and stability.

All our neighbours are of special importance to us. We have similar historical experiences and, in a civilisational sense, there is so much that unites us. My Government is making a special effort to revitalise and strengthen ties with all our neighbours and has initiated an intensive dialogue for finding mutually acceptable solutions to outstanding problems and enlarging the areas of cooperation.

Our traditionally close and friendly ties with Bhutan and Maldives have been further strengthened. With Bangladesh, we have a stable relationship. We shall endeavour to create an atmosphere of trust so that we can seek mutually acceptable solutions to our common problems, including the sharing and augmentation of river waters, flood control and the delimitation of the maritime boundary. With the return home of the IPKF from Sri Lanka, we are hopeful that the Sri Lankan Government will fulfil its promises of devolution of power and ensure the safety, security and democratic aspirations of their Tamil people. Amity between the different peoples of Sri Lanka is beneficial not only for them, but would directly contribute to peace and stability in the region.

With Nepal, our relations are rooted in history. As a democracy ourselves, we have welcomed the steps towards democratisation in Nepal. It is for the Nepalese people to evolve their own polity and establish their own traditions of democracy. We, as their friends and neighbours, are ready to find ways and means of resolving all outstanding issues and restoring our traditional relationship in its entirety.

One of the most stable relationships in the post-War period has been the time-tested friendship and cooperation between India and

the Soviet Union. The resilience and dynamic growth of this relationship has contributed significantly to international peace and stability. At a time of internal re-structuring in the Soviet Union, both our countries are working together to find imaginative and innovative ways to further strengthen our traditional friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation.

There has been a welcome improvement of India's relations with the United States in recent years. The United States is our largest trading partner and the major supplier of high technology. Our political dialogue with the United States has resulted in a better appreciation of mutual concerns and shared perceptions on a number of issues. I am confident that this relationship will continue to be strengthened.

There has been a significant improvement in India's relations with China. Both countries are committed to continuing the process of enhancing cooperation in diverse fields and promoting a closer dialogue on international issues. This is in the interest of both countries and for peace, stability and equitable development in Asia and the world. There is the political will both in India and China to find a fair, reasonable and mutual acceptable settlement of the boundary question.

In Afghanistan we hope there will be early stoppage of bloodshed with strict implementation of the Geneva Accords and a political solution arrived at by our Afghan friends themselves. It is important that Afghanistan's status as a sovereign, independent and nonaligned country is preserved.

The greatest threat to world peace is posed by nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. As long as such weapons exist, the world must live with the threat of extinction through a holocaust triggered by accident or design. India was among the first countries to repudiate the rationale of nuclear weapons and strongly urged comprehensive disarmament. As early as 1946, Mahatma Gandhi said:

"I regard the employment of the Atom Bomb for the wholesale destruction of men, women and children, as the most diabolical use of Science."

Gandhiji also rejected the concept of deterrence. Nuclear disarmament and its direct connection with peaceful co-existence was one of Pandit Nehru's major pre-occupations. He was fully alive to the annihilation that nuclear weapons can cause but more than that, he was concerned about the conceptual justification for nuclear deterrence. For him, all violence began in the human mind and, therefore, it was the human mind that must change and accept the futility of the nuclear path.

It was on the basis of this fundamental rejection of nuclear weapons as weapons of war that India made many concrete contributions to

the cause of nuclear disarmament. Nehru was among the first world statesmen to have demanded a ban on nuclear weapons testing in 1954. Throughout the fifties, he led the protest against nuclear weapons-tests and this consciousness contributed towards the conclusion of the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963.

India took the initiative in 1961 in the UN General Assembly to call for outlawing the use of nuclear weapons by seeking to adopt a resolution which described the use of nuclear weapons as a crime against humanity.

There was overwhelming support for this initiative and the 1961 resolution has become a landmark in the fight against nuclear weapons and the doctrine of nuclear deterrence. In 1964 India also proposed a practical approach to ensure non-proliferation of nuclear weapons—both horizontal and vertical. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, however, ignored vertical proliferation and sought to impose discriminatory and inequitable obligations on non-nuclear weapons states. This is, in principle, unacceptable to India.

In order to arrest the trend towards incessant increase in global arsenals, Indira Gandhi along with five other leaders, launched a Six-nation Five-Continent initiative in 1984, to mobilise world opinion to halt and reverse the nuclear arms race. In the same spirit, India and the Soviet Union signed the Delhi Declaration in November 1986, embodying a joint vision of the future of mankind in nuclear weapons-free and non-violent world. These ideas were carried forward and presented in a concrete time bound Action Plan for ushering in a world without nuclear weapons, which India presented to the United Nations in 1988. The Action Plan also put forward proposals for restructuring the global security system; for disarmament by itself is not enough, it must be accompanied by change in attitudes, in objectives, in doctrines, so that armed rivalry and the urge for domination can give way to a new world order based on peaceful co-existence.

One of the major developments of this century has been the growing realisation that there are issues of global concern which transcend partisan and regional interests. Nothing has driven this home more dramatically than shared environmental and ecological dangers. Consumption patterns in one part of the world are inextricably linked with the well-being of other parts. Environmental degradation and denudation of forest cover affects our collective well-being. The issues of global warming, depletion of the ozone layer and preservation of bio-diversity are already on the international agenda. What is needed is a comprehensive approach which analyses the different factors which lead to environmental degradation in the developing and industrialised nations and evolves equitable solutions.

Any agreements must take into account the imperative requirement of the developing countries to overcome poverty and ensure a certain basic standard of living. The developing nations would need to be given free access to environment friendly technologies and the additional resources to facilitate their switchover to such technologies. Programmes for afforestation and land conservation also need to be given priority to avert the cycle of prolonged drought and famine in which many developing nations are caught, as a consequence of environmental degradation. India has supported the Brundtland Commission's Report on the Environment and is actively participating in international consultations and preparations for the first World Conference on the Environment.

As Indira Gandhi had pointed out, peace is also threatened by the growing economic disparities between the rich and poor nations. There can never be durable global peace so long as millions of people across the world remain mired in poverty. A major international effort is needed to redress the factors underlying global poverty, including more equitable terms of trade, the growing problem of indebtedness and greater financial flows. Unfortunately, the North-South dialogue remains suspended. We will continue our efforts to revive this dialogue.

India separately took the initiative to set up a summit level group of 15 developing nations to try to evolve a coordinated approach by the South on global economic issues and for intensification of South-South cooperation.

The issue of democratisation is important to us. Efforts at the national level must remain the responsibility of the concerned people themselves, their government and the State. Problems of systematic political change, establishment and functioning of representative governments, the rule of law, freedom of the media and judiciary—are all essential parts of the domestic jurisdiction of a sovereign State and, therefore, beyond the direct restraining influences of international law. It is, however, recognised by most enlightened people that stabilisation of a democratic polity is a more dependable and humane way of solving basic human problems.

Democratisation also has the other important dimension of recognising the equality and sovereignty of all nation-states irrespective of their size, location or resource endowments. A necessary consequence of such equality is the rejection of the doctrines of balance of power or spheres of influence. Nationalism is an important element in the identity and self image of a majority of the world community. Political freedom which has been won at great cost, must not be subverted through interference. Externally inspired secession, whether in the

false garb of self-determination or religious identity or a dubious sub-nationalism, is the anti-thesis of democracy. Pluralism and diversity, tolerance and reconciliation of opposites have given India its national identity. No externally inspired effort aimed at subverting our integrity will be allowed to succeed.

The world today is undergoing dramatic changes. Many positive trends are clearly evident. The cold war is over and there is a welcome movement towards detente between the major powers. Some encouraging steps towards disarmament are in the process of being taken. Democratic values and respect for human rights are finding increasing acceptance. Democracy is taking roots in Eastern Europe, in our neighbourhood and elsewhere. There is evidence of a new openness and of resolving political issues through negotiations. There is a reduced emphasis on dogma and a greater emphasis on institutional inter-dependence. There is a growing awareness of the inter-relationship between sustainable economic development and environmental protection. There is a growing concern for global issues that transcend narrow nationalism and focus on long-term benefits to humanity as a whole.

But there are disturbing trends as well. There has been a spurt in international terrorism. Narcotics have become an international menace. There is convincing evidence of the linkages between narcotics and terrorism. The civilised conduct of international relations, the rule of law in democratic societies and the process of development in several parts of the developing world are being threatened by these scourges to our civilisation.

In a world economy which is becoming increasingly inter-dependent, there is the clear need to strengthen multilateral rules and institutions under the United Nations, for providing a framework for facilitating the global integrative process. This is being threatened by the disturbing trend to resort to unilateralism and bilateralism. We are concerned at such actions to bypass and dilute the multilateral process.

It is against this backdrop and in the light of the major historical changes the world is undergoing, that India must continue to evolve its foreign policy and enhance its legitimate role in international affairs. India is too populous and too large not to conceive an independent and legitimate role for itself. This is a necessary consequence of our sovereignty and political autonomy. India seeks to play a role consistent with its inherent strengths and its commitment to the values of freedom, democracy, secularism and economic inter-dependence. At the present juncture, when the world is gradually moving from conflict and confrontation to dialogue, mutual understanding, and peaceful cooperation, India is uniquely placed to make an useful contribution.

Our foreign policy must continue to reflect the value system that is the basis of our nationhood and our identity. India must continue to pursue the middle way of synthesis between age old values and progressive change. We must pursue with greater vigour the path of cooperation and peace based on political independence and an acceptance of diversity.

There is an ancient Indian saying: "The truth is one, but the wise discern it variously". This philosophy of tolerance has been the hallmark of our civilization. In the conduct of international affairs, this finds its best expression in Panchsheel. There may be different ways of progress, possibly different outlooks, but if we have to survive, we must learn to live together in tolerance, despite our differences. There is no other alternative.

Men, Patterns of Moving Dust: Oral Poetry of Indian Tribes

Sitakant Mahapatra

It was a sparkling moon-lit night in a lonely tribal village of Orissa lost in the midst of dense forests: the night of full-moon in the month of *Pous* (corresponding to January) and one of the most important festivals of the Mundas. The lonely village street near the *Akhra* was gradually filling up with the villagers. In groups they came, boys and girls, old men and women, dressed for the dance, humming tunes in high spirits. It was no longer the same village I had seen in the daytime: featureless, squalid and ordinary. It had been transformed by the magic of moonlight and the exuberance of spirit all round. They danced and they sang. Ancient, timeless songs. Old as the neighbouring hills, ancient as the moon. There were sprinklings of improvisations, and interpolations, from the new world growing up around them; the world of development blocks, jeeps, village-level workers, of Government, fertilizers, insecticides and birth control pills. But these were mostly from the dancers of the younger generation. An old tribal sat by my side watching the dance, almost completely drunk, and looking very much lost. Suddenly he broke into song, like a winter tree coming into leaf. I can still hear the soft agony of that ageless voice and song. It was a part of that natural order, the lonely moon-lit night of the empty mountains and forests, almost the voice of the night. Then I knew the tragedy inherent in the situation; the near-impossibility of integrating the tribal people into the greater society while preserving intact their cultural autonomy and individuality. It was only right that public policy should not treat them merely as museum specimens to be preserved isolated and uncontaminated by modern society, in deep forests for study as "noble savages" by the scholars from cities. But may not socio-economic integration for the tribes bring about a cultural anomie, a drying-up of those sources of fulness of spirit, dark energy and exuberance that characterise much of the tribal way of life? May not their own oral tradition of songs be either forgotten, despised or hybridised by treatment with "insecticides" and "pills", by their own younger generation? May not acculturation and growing sophistication kill the authenticity of life, art-form and

songs of these simple tribals? May not the more educated young men reject the very social milieu of which these songs and dances are the symbols? Certainly these songs deserve to be collected and preserved before perhaps they are sung no more and, maybe, die out.

The primitive poem or song is part of a complex of communal activity, which includes singing, dancing, religious celebration and celebration of social occasions. The songs, the dances and the relevant festivities are intimately and integrally related. For celebrating each important religious festival or socio-religious ceremony, the tribals have an appropriate set of songs and dances. It is necessary to view these poem-songs as part of such a total communal activity, which is not true of modern poetry.

The recognised performers remember the songs very well, particularly when they happen to be of the older generation. Most of the songs circulate by the process of oral transmission and their roots lie buried deep in the group-life of the tribes. There are no fixed song-makers and no attempt is made to take credit for having discovered or improvised any song. Most of the songs have come down from generations and performers learn them from their elders. The continuity of the old tradition is thus maintained.

The poems or songs often accompany dancers. The recitation of the words and the movement of the body are the two co-ordinates of the graph of socio-religious and ritual action which they define and describe. Curt Sachs, the noted authority on primitive dance, has said that, for the primitive, "dance was a means of control over the surroundings". This endeavours to gain control over nature expressed itself through a psychological process of sympathetic transcreation. And the transcreation was a combination of bodily gestures, verbal symbolism and prescribed ritual action. For example, the Sarhul festival of the Mundas is partly a vegetation ceremony and also partly a fecundity ceremony. The ceremonial bath, the stacking of rice in baskets and the offering of rice beer to the village ancestors and using some of this rice for sowing is associated with fertility. It is thus an invocation for more members in the tribe, for more sons and daughters. The Sarhul procession is taken out to the village sarna, the village deity. The festival is celebrated by liberal drinking and dancing. The pattern of dancing thus gets integrally related to the text and meaning of the song and the rituals accompanying it.

The anonymity of the song-makers is a notable phenomenon in primitive society. The absence of a written language makes the process of transmission of the songs with their complex structure of social and communal association an amazing phenomenon. For the arrangement of words, the stylistic pattern and the grouping of images remain

virtually unchanged over the years and this is largely because of this unwritten, oral character. "Anonymity in the present structure of society", said Robert Graves, "usually implies that the author is ashamed of his authorship or afraid of the consequences if he reveals himself; but in a primitive society, it is due to just the carelessness about the author's name." This kind of carelessness is inherent in the primitive mind, for what is important for him is the song and not the song-maker. To that extent he can be compared to the unknown artists, painters and sculptors, who in Konarak, in Khajuraho and all the world over, in sculpture, architecture and painting, have not left behind their names even while enriching the common heritage of humankind. The primitive mind does not know the emphasis on the ego, the 'conceit' of the author which the twentieth century has brought so much to the forefront. The lack of any personal aspiration and ambition for name and fame makes these songs so much more genuine and authentic. The songs remain; the emotions they convey remain for the creator's sons and daughters, and their offspring after them. What more could the primitive singer wish for himself!

The world of oral poetry of Indian primitive tribes is an almost unexplored but vanishing world. Archer, Elwin and perhaps a few other scholars have gathered and presented some of this vast body of poetry. But they have only touched the tip of the iceberg. Hundreds of thousands of songs remain undocumented. And what is more important, with rapid socio-economic transformation they run the risk of dying out or being distorted beyond recognition. There are a very large number of tribes. Even in respect of the three states in eastern India—Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal—there are nearly one hundred tribal groups. In Orissa alone there are sixty-two groups. What is analysed here are only small selections from the poetry of seven selected tribes in these three states.

Far too long have the songs, the tales, the mythologies, the rituals and legends of the 'primitive' tribes been treated as mere ethnological data; and, in an age of the assumed superiority of economic analysis of ethnographic materials, no wonder they are looked upon as somewhat residuary and unscientific and, in any case, of only marginal interest to the social anthropologist. This situation is not peculiar to India. It is a world-wide phenomenon. A time has come when it must be realised that, while we can speak of stages in technological growth, the same cannot be said of growth or efflorescence in the field of culture. There is no linear growth in the cultures of societies and all aspects of culture may not be susceptible to economic analysis. And the word 'primitive' itself is somewhat of a misnomer. The Aztecs, the Mayas were also perhaps 'primitives' from this point of view.

Levels of culture are not proportionately related to either levels of economic affluence, personal incomes or levels of consumption or the capacity of the individual as a waste-maker. Social anthropology has to view these data as extremely significant tools of analysing personality traits, normative attitudes and social actions and behaviour-patterns. Scientism, whether of economic or political anthropology, can be a fallacy if not seen in the perspective of social processes, personal responses and inter-personal relationships. Further, it is high time we realised the immense value of these songs, legends, and mythologies, as literature *per se*. The absence of a written language, a script or proclaimed authorship of the songs or narrations do not in any way detract from the excellence of the songs or poems. All the song-poems are in fact anonymously authored. But, as Robert Graves stressed, contrary to the situation in modern societies anonymity is favoured not for avoiding guilt or embarrassment but because of the absence of a heightened ego which would claim all art-creation as that of the individual creator.

Years back Arthur Waley complained of the almost total lack of attention by the ethnologists to unwritten poetry. He observed, "Ethnological interest goes in waves. Now it is skulls, now it is kinship ties, now it is 'character-types'." So far songs have never been the fashion. It is easy enough to substantiate this assertion. For example, the most recent general work on primitive life, Boas's *General Anthropology* has only four or five pages on song, as opposed to a hundred pages on economic organization. Another proof of the lack of work upon traditional song is the fact that when in 1934 the Anthropological Congress was held in London, out of nearly a hundred papers there was not one which dealt specifically with song. "It may of course be said that song is not a detachable, independent subject and is bound up with music, dance and other activities. But there were scores of papers which dealt with much narrower subjects; there was one, for example, on Aspects of Dentition".

Or take another test. I possess about a hundred and fifty books on ethnology. Only four or five of them mention singing, and there is not one which treats of it at all adequately!

That was in 1940. Forty years and more later the situation is not very much better. Tribal oral traditions have been, no doubt, studied and more of the poetry of the primitives published but social anthropology is still not very kind to the study of primitive songs as a method of sociological enquiry. Besides, these songs are not merely of interest as sociological literature; they have a lot of value as poetry. As regards Indian tribal poetry, Verrier Elwin's *Folk Songs of Chhatisgarh*, *Folk Songs of Maikal Hills*, *Songs of the Forest* (the latter two with Shamrao

Hivale) and W.G. Archer's *The Blue Grove, the Dove and the Leopard* and *The Hill of Flutes* have made significant contributions towards an understanding and appreciation of these folk songs and poems. In *The Baiga*, an ethnic monograph, Elwin made extensive use of songs as sociological 'documents'. As a matter of fact, poetry and ethnography are inseparable in this wonderful work. Archer's translations of Oraon songs in the two anthropologies referred to followed the technique of Arthur Waley's brilliant transcriptions of Chinese poems. *The Blue Grove* contained some of the finest translations of Indian tribal poetry I have seen to date. They were done with a great deal of delicacy and revealed a high sense of intimacy with the Oraon way of life and sensibility. Mention may also be made of Hem Barua and Gopinath Mohanty's contribution in this field. Barring, however, these and a few other works, the picture, unfortunately, remains as bleak today as in the forties.

There have been no systematic attempts to document the oral poetry of the different primitive tribes all over the country. Analysis of the songs, the myths, the tales, the legends and the riddles can follow, but the first task is a systematic collection of these data which run the risk of vanishing into oblivion through sheer disuse and neglect. In each tribal group, generally speaking, the younger generation which has got the benefit of modern education tends to look down upon participation in the songs and dances of the tribe. Eager to climb the socio-economic ladder, they forget the lore of the tribe and, with the passing of the generations, certain songs also die and nobody knows them. Even within a decade I have seen proof of such extinction in particular tribal villages. In 1978 nobody knew or remembered a song which was recited with gusto in 1970 as the main voices, which has been those of a few old men, were no longer there. It is, therefore, essential that we collect all the traditional songs, myths, stories, riddles, rituals, and cosmologies as early as possible, systematise them and analyse them, not as oral literature but also in relation to value-systems, social structures, personality traits and symbolic milieu.

These oral poems are highly concrete in their treatment of theme and generally refer to some specific aspect of community life, its myth or symbolic structure. In a sense, the entire community life of the tribal is a very intense and uniform symbolic milieu. There is, therefore, no problem of communication, no difficulty of aesthetic distance that burdens so much of modern art and poetry. For us in modern society the symbolic milieu has been completely fragmented. The mythical universe is no longer part of a living tradition in most urbanised communities. When attempts are made to resuscitate the myth there is a genuine risk of its appearing as part of cultural anthropology

rather than literature. This, I believe, is the difficulty in Eliot's poetry. The Waste Land goes back to *The Golden Bough* and *From Ritual to Romance*, but society no longer understands or, rather, is no longer immersed in, the living myths of the tribe. It is, therefore, at best, harking back to an academic tradition; at worst an attempt to bring in too much of cultural anthropology. The difficulty of a return to myth and to myth-oriented literature so extensively attempted by Eliot and Pound, and given such stout critical support by Professor Northrop Frye, is precisely this: the roots of social consciousness in the West are no longer in those fertile, dark and primitive unconscious. But to the Munda, the Oraon, the Kondh or the Parajas the myths are ever present realities. Their poetry, therefore, is very much concrete. Take this Munda song:

Dreaming of you in bed
I woke and took to the road.
Stumbling the stone
On the village-road I remembered
I remembered my caste, my gotra
And stood transfixed.

The obstacle to love here is not merely a mental block. The stone is not merely physical: it is mental itself. The stone marks the point where the remains of the ancestors lie buried, the symbol of kinship and *gotra*. So when the boy stumbles on the obstacle, it is also a mental block. The stone is the ancestor and thus the song expresses a very concrete despair. As if the stone says, 'No it cannot be' and this denial may be more insistent and forceful than oral objections of parents in a traditional society.

In all primitive songs words are only part of a complex grouping of communal activities, namely, religious or social activities and dances. The accompaniment of dance with regular patterns of body movements or mimetic gestures with supporting actions like clapping or stamping of feet influence the pattern of the words. To this extent the songs which are merely word-patterns lose something in standing alone without the music and the movement.

In a pluralistic society the autonomy of the cultural groups constituting it needs to be preserved and strengthened. This strengthening cannot however, be achieved, either by looking upon the primitive communities as museum specimens to be retained tucked away in valleys and hills and to be studied by the 'civilised' scholars from the cities, or by seeking to assimilate them into the melting pot of the larger community by encysting them. The healthy attitude should be to see them, as Rothenberg observes, as "a series of communally-struc-

tured and ecologically sound models from which to learn something about the reorganization of the society and the revitalization of life and thought."

In these societies there is poverty but there is no public squalor. A Santal house, for example, is the last word in neatness and order. The delicately carved bamboo-rods used by the Kondhs to keep their tobacco can be envy of any artist. Tragedies abound but there is no disgust for life, no turning back on it. There is no fashionable pessimism. At a time when it seems to require courage to say that man can be happy, the life-view of these primitive communities has a special meaning for us.

Life for the primitive tribes may be cruel and hard. Occasions of celebration, of festivals and joy, only briefly punctuate a life otherwise burdened with poverty, undernourishment and exploitation. But still, life is looked upon as an opportunity, and all activity as a thanksgiving for all the beauty and sacredness of nature, the hills and the valleys, the rustling streams and flitting butterflies. Many tribal songs have, no doubt, no purpose other than enjoyment; quite a number have an ostensible social or ritual purpose; but the largest number is concerned with the quest of beauty and holiness, of dreams and fantasies which transform the sordid ordinariness of daily existence into something rich and strange.

Of the large number of tribal groups inhabiting Orissa, Bengal and Bihar, at least seven have a fairly large body of oral literature, including poetry, which needs to be properly documented and analysed. In particular this is true of the Mundas and the Oraons, the Kondhs and Parajas, the Santals, the Hos and the Koyas. Some of the songs are of a narrative type: others don't tell a story but refer to some significant mood, situation or emotion. Narrative poetry largely relates to the cosmology of the tribes, their historical origins and migration in historical times. More important than these narrative poems are the poems associated with the festivals running through the cycle of seasons and rituals like birth, naming ceremony, attainment of puberty, marriage and death. The festival songs and a large number of the ritual songs usually accompany dances. As such, the melodies of many of the songs can be transcribed in regular musical notation. Working on the melodic patterns of the tribal songs of eastern India, an eminent Hungarian musicologist, Dr. Rudolf Vig has found close similarity between them and gypsy music. He has put forward the interesting hypothesis that many tribal communities of India were possibly the original settlers of Eastern Europe around the Caspian sea and migrated to India many centuries ago.

These poems or songs can be considered from various points of

view. Since they are meant to be sung they are often susceptible to expression in musical notation. The scores of a few songs have been attempted by musicologists to generate an interest in this area. Secondly, the song-poems can be analysed also from the point of view of literature, their excellence as poetry. Often it is a poetry of symbolism and extended metaphor with a freshness all its own. Thirdly, often they have a ritual, social or religious purpose, be it the celebration of a phase in the agricultural cycle, a life-crisis or a normal social function. Fourthly, dance numbers generally accompany them and they deserve to be studied also from that point of view.

Like all oral literature, these tribal songs also undergo a number of distortions over a period of time. Among the distortions which are common to oral poetry mention may be made of the incorporation of stray lines composed of words borrowed from the events and situations in the context of development efforts in the tribal areas and the changing tribal scene. In traditional Baha songs of the Santals, for example, they can improvise to the incorporation of a line like 'The Babus have come, they have come in a jeep', to rhyme with the line, 'spring has come', welcoming the first flowering of sal and mahul trees with the advent of spring. Secondly, the traditional songs also tend to lose the wealth of old associations of peculiar, archaic words and are modernised by the new composers. This has happened to Oraon songs and also, more significantly, to Kondh songs. In the early forties, the well-known Oriya novelist, Gopinath Mohanty, collected the songs of the Kōndhs of Koraput. He translated a number of them into Oriya. In respect of others he provided only gists. Forty years later, it has not been possible to get at the meaning of all the words of the original songs even in the villages from which these songs were collected. Being an oral tradition, its strength lies in authentic oral transmission from generation to generation, and as such disappearance of certain words, subtle nuances and lines from traditional songs is not to be wondered at.

The most fascinating aspect of tribal poems is their symbolism. Owen Barfield in his *Poetic Diction* puts forward the interesting thesis that poetic diction is nothing but the primitive, undifferentiated state of language, when objects are identical with, and non-distinct from the bundle of associations they give rise to. This is the key to the understanding of the nature of symbolism in tribal poetry and its basic difference from symbolism in modern poetry. Basically, symbolism in modern poetry is an attempt to look for the unfamiliar, the concrete and the strange in a world excessively devitalised by the drabness of familiarity and generalised abstraction. It tries to break the stranglehold of the referential, representational and discursive use of language

in everyday use. The world we live in is not the symbolic world of the primitive. It is mapped out, connected, intelligible. A sense of wonder and awe is discounted. For the primitive, on the other hand, social communication is itself part of the vast symbolic milieu in which he swims as a fish. The strange and the unknown peer out of everything and language is a method gaining some control and direction in such a world. In a sense the entire linguistic structure is a symbol. This can be illustrated by any number of tribal poems from this region. For example this Munda song:

The mahul tree
Full of branches and leaves
How it made the paddy field look lovely!
They are cutting away the mahul tree.
You five brothers, save it, save it!

Here the subject is not at all the mahul tree. It is the girl who has been given away in marriage. The village will look desolate when she is gone. And 'they' are the members of the bridegroom's party. All this is never stated but always understood. Further, the brothers are not really expected to drive away the bridegroom's party. It is only a mock protest and a reference to the brother's role as the sister's defender in that society.

In an Oraon poem oranges are very cleverly used as sex symbols for a girl's breasts and the ripe, raw and half-ripe are described as being 'too sweet', 'too sour', and 'sweet sour' respectively. This can be compared to the Maikal Hill folk song:

He saw ripe lemons on her tree
How could he control his hunger?

In another Oraon poem:

To a tree full of fruits
Come birds to peck
Crows, pigeons, doves
And they chirp and frolic

The tree is the house of a man who has a number of marriageable daughters. The girls can also be sweet-smelling mallika flowers. The girls of village Diuri and Surmali are, in a Munda dance number, compared to ludam and champak flowers:

How nicely they bend down
The ludams of Diuri
How sweetly they wave in the breeze

The champaks of Surmali.
When moving in a line or running in a curve
What a necklace do they weave.

This kind of hidden symbolism in what is called the 'clue' poems, is quite common in Mundari and Oraon folk songs but not in Kondh or Paraja songs.

The following Munda poem makes an interesting use of sexual symbolism:

Red alta on your feet
Yellow turmeric on the palms
Which alta field did you enter
Whose turmeric field did you go to?
Tell me truly, dear,
Did you enter a house of turmeric?

In Munda and Oraon society red is often a symbol for life, energy and sex. The 'sindur' or vermilion mark on the forehead and in the parting of the hair is a symbol of married life. Red also stands for blood. Similarly, turmeric has associations with marriage and loss of virginity. Entering an alta field or a house of turmeric, therefore, suggests loss of virginity or sexual intercourse.

In the Munda poem the 'well' is a symbol for the girl's sex:

There is a well at the end of the village
Its brick walls shine and glitter
.....
The bucket went down and down
The poor girl how she wept
And wept.

The well in tribal society is very much of a social institution. It is the club for the village women where they come to fetch water and exchange the gossip of the day. The well is a trysting place for lovers. But it also is often used as a symbol of the female sex as in the earlier example. A Gond song upbraids a girl:

O little well, you give no water,
Your youth is past
Think well, your youth is ended

While a Dhanwar song says of a girl who has come of age:

She still
Looks like a parrot
But the well
Is full of water now.

In most Kondh songs every line of the song ends in a refrain. This gives it the facility for recitation. Often a few singers will recite the original lines and the refrain lines will be picked up by the rest. In the translation, however, these repetitive lines do not add much to the meaning.

The Kondhs are fond of jokes and laughter. They appreciate other's jokes and can look at themselves jokingly, satirically. In the well-known Baile songs the boys and girls mockingly refer to each other's physical charms and personal qualities. While the tone is mocking and the song is only play-acting, there may be an undercurrent of the hard facts of life, either in old age or in some unfortunate marriages. The Kondh is thus capable of terrible non-seriousness and irreverence. How else does he face the trials of life which are only too many: death, disease, privations, tigers, wild animals and the exploitations of wilder men?

The love songs are particularly delicate and reveal the endless feelings of intimacy between the boys and the girls. The symbols used are often highly original and the underlying pathos deeply-moving, as can be seen from the following extracts:

1. Why then did you leave?
 The dance in the grove is yet to end,
 The cocks yet to crow;
 Dancing to the tune
 How gracefully you were floating along.
 Sweet as a song;
 And the jingling of your bangles
 Had the soft melody of hailstones
 Falling in the dark.
 But in a moment,
 What illusive mist or dark clouds,
 What lunacy swallowed you;
 You quietly left.

Did not you proclaim unending love?
Our intimacy that is
Anklet to the feet, ring to the ear,
Why, why then did you leave?

2. Life is fleeting
 Old age exhausts everything;
 As crops do not thrive well
 On lands once cultivated
 And again dug up,
 In an old man's life

Joy withers.
So as life lasts
And hearts beat,
Come, let us enjoy
Let us play.

3. The old hearts still beat,
And we are alive,
Here in this ancient village
Of dead ancestors;
And so today we could partake
Of this great jubilation
This over-flowing joy.

Shortlived is the dance of an old man
Meagre the meat of the barking deer;
So as life lasts
We make merry.

4. Man's tragedy is alike
From childhood.
Useless iron is thrown into corners
The poor man enters the forest
Crowbar on the shoulders
Basket on the head
And life, only a tragic song.

The beloved is compared to the "distant fire-play", the "jungle fowl", the "surging siali creeper", the "esi bird of the forest". She looks at him from the lonely verandah with "a crab's silent stare". "She is a child lost in the dream world". Their friendship is compared to "ring to the finger" and "anklet to the feet" and when she goes away "the brass string of my dung-dunga weeps" and rings out:

How sweetly,
It rings out the agony,
The bare, naked voice of grief.
And I cry,
Helpless, forlorn,
Like the little girl
Whose widowed mother
Walks away with a stranger
To a new house.

The songs are mostly confessions of intense love by the dhangda to the dhangdi or vice versa. Most likely, he will play his flute or

dung-dunga which will call out the assigned name of his beloved while spending the night in the dormitory. The assigned name of his beloved is essentially a camouflage so that he does not stand exposed before his friends or the other girls in the girls' dormitory. Everything is promised: love, happiness, wealth. Appeal is also made to the sympathy of the girl for he will be forlorn like a little girl if his love is not returned. Passion is hinted at in the blue surge of the moon and there may be a forcible taking away which is often met initially with indignation, then resignation and finally acceptance. For does not a dhangdi prize courage, physical stamina and professed love?

She is invited to "come, entwine me/delicate pumpkin creeper". A village where there are no dhangdas and dhangdis (unmarried boys and unmarried girls) is a "rotten village fit only for dogs and jackals". And thus the endless dialogues, the infinite numbers of questions and answers are kept on and on in the nights from the dormitory to the tune of the dung-dungas and the flutes. Love names are assigned: Nilas, Talas, Lembar, and Dumbar. The flow of life rushes on despite poverty, misery and death.

The invocatory songs of the Santals and the Meria song of the Kondhs are almost reminiscent of the Vedic rituals invoking prosperity and plenty for the community. For the tribals the supernatural world, the world of bongas, of spirits and dead ancestors, is as real as the natural and social world he lives in. There is a benign or evil god in the neighbouring hill, the flowing stream at the outskirts of the village, the sacred grove and even the domestic kitchen. These gods take an intimate interest in human affairs and their blessings have to be invoked by appropriate propitiatory devices. Here poetry and ritual go hand in hand and serve an intimate and important social objective.

It has been typical of Indian social organisation that it has always sought to create such a living and growing community, which is in essence a community of communities.

Among different models of integration of tribal culture and society with the larger society emphasis was so far placed only on the theory of a melting pot with constant give-and-take and cross-cultural co-existence. The time has come also to emphasize the search by the tribes for universal human values inherent in their own cultural matrix. The search for the great tradition, for abiding historical values transcending the demands of here and now, point to this. This is a positive sign for cultural growth and efflorescence vis-a-vis the arid confrontation or withdrawal of earlier years.

There are signs of an emerging force of counter-alienation in this new search for cultural roots by the tribal groups. Over-emphasis on ethnicity leads to a drying-up of sources, an anomie grows in the

heart. A genuine awareness and growing interest in tribal culture will sustain our commitments to universal values which emphasise community, instinct and imagination and may even help us look at the city as a conglomeration of neighbourhoods or as Buber's community of communities with varying cultural patterns, beliefs and value-orientations fitted into a mosaic.

One of the consequences of a greater awareness of the cultural traditions of the primitive tribes can be to induce us to step outside the prevailing climate of over-emphasis on cultural relativity that has encouraged cultural myopia and ethnocentrism. It can broaden our very conception of art. It is necessary to remember that the forms called art today were not perceived as such in earlier times or by other cultures. As we know, even in the western tradition one era sometimes did not understand another. For example, in the twelfth century no one really looked at Greek art. Similarly the seventeenth century almost totally disregarded medieval art.

The intensity of life despite poverty and the pathos and anguish accompany personal intimacy, are reminiscent of Dylan Thomas' lines:

And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

Short-lived is the dance of the old man,
Meagre the flesh of the barking deer.

Despite tragedy and death, the Kondhs and Parajas, the Mundas and Oraons, and other tribal societies have produced a level of cultural excellence where a highly complex sensibility gives rise to a poetry which is yet simple and couched in the idiom of the folk. The old man in a marriage festival remembers his earlier days:

The old hearts still beat,
And we are alive,
Here in this ancient village
Of dead ancestors:
And so today we could partake
Of this great jubilation
This over-flowing joy.

In the words of Frederic Prokosch: "Men, patterns of moving dust, loving those familiar limbs, learned to think, lovely curves so tenderly shaped to receive and give closed their long eyes, their thighs cooled in the old tribal water and cooled their dreams in unending memory of endless years."

The Feminine Voice in the Urdu Ghazal

Carla Petievich

There is, in the process of canon formation, a manner of conceiving cultural reality in idealized images that too often veils certain elements of cultural production, "disappearing" them from view. I would like to note at the outset that this argument refers only to the classical *ghazal*, and does not extend to either modern lyric poetry or other classical genres. If the disappearance of these elements is acquiesced to, eventually only the veil may remain, and what it has replaced may also disappear from memory, leaving us incapable of even imagining their existence. Cultural products aberrant to the reality imagined by formulators of literary canons, when "disappeared" like voices of dissent, also disappear from memory. It is in contemplation of voices lost from the memory of Urdu readers and writers that this essay is written. Its particular subject is the Dakani *ghazal*, written between the end of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the courts of Bijapur and Golkunda. While a corpus of a Dakani literature predating classical Urdu poetry is widely known by modern Urdu readers to have existed, very few have any exposure or knowledge of what comprised this early literature.

Ever since Urdu was claimed as a literary language by Mughal Delhi in the eighteenth century, both the language and its literature have represented a field of contention. This contention was perhaps inevitable, given the high value placed upon products of the Perso-Indian blend of cultures brought about Muslim rule in India. Notwithstanding the enormous value Mughal India placed upon purely Persian arts and literature, the fact that Urdu poetry was composed in an Indian language made it a particularly potent signifier of Indo-Muslim culture. Thus, as long as the Mughals were even nominal rulers of India, Urdu enjoyed pride of place. Its cultural products were, after all, those of a world-renowned and admired political organism. Patronage of the arts being a significant political resource, articulation and control of Urdu culture has been a major concern of India's Muslim elite since at least as far back as the mid-eighteenth century, when regional courts began to establish cultural centers out-

side the Mughal capital at Delhi. Lucknow and Delhi, for example, acted out a fierce political and literary rivalry throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. Key to this rivalry was an attempt by Dihlavis to equate legitimate Urdu and Indo-Muslim culture solely with Mughal Delhi, and this attempt is amply illustrated in Urdu literary discourse from as early as the first decade of the nineteenth century. For example, in the poet Insha's grammatical treatise, *Dariya-i Lafafat*, (1807), we find the statement that:

"The reason Lucknow stands above other cities is that poets who were born and beloved of Delhi have come to this city. Thus Lucknow was moulded in Delhi's image, according to its rule, and is its spirit, its life, its *jan*..."

Articulating what constitutes the particular culture of Indian Muslims, where its center (*markaz*) is located, what it stands for, and what its values are has engaged the Indo-Muslim elite simultaneously on an inter-societal level (as in the context of an India colonized from outside by the British) for more than a century; and at an intra-societal level (as in the case of rivalry between Lucknow and Delhi) since about a century previous to that. Both contexts are important to the present argument, because while British rule forced and Indo-Muslim discourse to develop in response to colonial discourse as a means of negotiating a place for itself in post-Mughal India, it also forced members of this Muslim elite to articulate their identity to themselves in more general terms than what it meant to be simply Dihlavi or Lakhnawi or Haidarabadi. A shared language and literary culture—that of Urdu—served as an organizing principle for this expanded identity. It is of particular concern presently because South Asian Muslims are still deeply involved in articulating and reiterating what Urdu culture represents in the late-twentieth century.

Central to colonial discourse, often made explicit in British correspondence, and certainly illustrated in their interactions with Indian officials, was the assumption that Indians—especially existing Muslim rulers—were morally unfit to continue in office. Anyone familiar with the literature pertaining to the 1856 Annexation of Avadh will easily recall colonial fascination with Vajid Ali Shah's alleged harem of 400 women; the reputation of his court at Lucknow for luxury, lavishness and unimaginable sensuality; and the disdain and disbelief with which British officials dismissed the king's role as a poet. All this ambivalent fascination and more has been reproduced in modern fiction by Premchand (*Shatranj ke Khilari*) and on film by Satyajit Ray (*The Chessplayers*): as well as in British histories of the period. Such reproductions demonstrate that the power of colonial discourse manifests

itself in a degree of acceptance, on the part of Indian artists, that substantial aspects of indigenous culture were indeed decadent and morally suspect; and that this decadence and weakness precipitated the British overthrow of the Mughal empire.

In the aftermath of 1857, members of the erstwhile Mughal ruling elite were also susceptible to the power of this colonial discourse, even while attempting to parry its claims of their moral unfitness. At its very inception Urdu critical literature was one of reform. The first literary history, written by Maulana Muhammad Husain Azad in 1880 (*Ab-i Hayat*) distinguished between a worthier, "more traditional" (i.e. "Persian") stream of Urdu poetry and newer, less honorable poetry. Similarly, the first critical treatise by Khwaja Altaf Husain Hali, (*Muqaddmah-i She'r-o Sha'iri*, 1893) decried Urdu literature's fallen state, arguing that recent poetry was just not vigorous enough to withstand the "superior" culture of the West. For Azad and Hali, the cultural products of Lucknow embodied this newer, weaker literature. Delhi's, in contrast, was the more vigorous, traditional culture, and was to be harked back to if Muslims wanted to revitalize Urdu's literature and cultural prominence. This differentiation between Dihlavi and Lakhnawi poetry, often referred to as The Two-School theory, is only one manifestation of how colonial discourse permeates Urdu literary criticism. In both fictive representations of the fall of Avadh to the British and in this nascent literary criticism of the 1880s and 1890s; as well as in British histories; the latter two of which were often patronized indirectly and directly by colonial officials, Lucknow became a scapegoat. It was sacrificed and offered up to the British by Indian Muslims as an example of their own culture gone awry. This sacrifice was effected in order to preserve an image of a more pristine, nobler, Mughal (Dihlavi) culture, an unimpeachable Indo-Muslim culture, a culture whose exponents were fit to participate in the administration of British India.

A bi-product of the process just described was the construction of an Urdu literary canon. That those periods, poets and poetry discussed in Azad's *Ab-i Hayat* (and, to a lesser extent, in Hali's *Muqaddmah*) formed this first canon is evidenced by the fact that later criticism repeatedly refers back to the subjects and categories laid out by each. In neither text was Dakani poetry treated. Azad begins his "First Period of Urdu Literature" with Vali, who, he claimed, "was nobody's pupil," and this effectively establishes Vali as the first important *ghazal* poet of Urdu in Urdu critical writing.

As it happened, a classical Urdu literary culture had actually begun to develop in other geographical areas nearly two centuries before its cause was taken up by Delhi; and Urdu culture continued on

elsewhere, long after Delhi's decline as the cultural center. The non-Mughal, Muslim courts in the Deccan, Bijapur and Golkunda (present-day Hyderabad), patronized a cultural efflorescence which predates that of Delhi by about one hundred and fifty years. The Urdu literature from these Deccan courts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (especially the *ghazal*) poses a real problem for Mughal-identified Urdu critics. The problem breaks down, roughly, as follows:

The *ghazal* is the most prestigious and popular genre of classical poetry. Mughal inspiration to compose *ghazals* in Urdu is attributed to the poet Vali, who is said to have visited Delhi from the Deccan and brought his Urdu *divan* (collection of lyrics) with him around the turn of the eighteenth century. Until then, the preferred poetic language in Delhi had been Persian. Now, Vali Dakani may represent the beginning of a Mughal tradition of Urdu *ghazal*, but he comes near the end of a Dakani tradition of Urdu poetry reputedly established by a poet-king of Golkunda named Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (1566-1611). Muhammad Quli is called the first Urdu *sahib-i divan* (master of lyric), and his style of poetry is clearly acknowledged in a number of histories of Urdu literature as the precursor to that style immortalized by Urdu's great Mughal poets Mir Taqi Mir, Dard, Sauda, Ghalib and so on.

Surprisingly little critical attention has been paid to Dakani literature by the northerners who dominate the world of Urdu letters. Educated Urdu readers (except, perhaps, in Hyderabad) may have heard of the great Dakani poets, but they are almost singularly unfamiliar with their work. Despite its obvious historical importance Dakani poetry is not considered canonical. Azad was not the only Urdu critic whose writing helped keep this early poetry in the dark, though he may have been the first. Abdus Salam Nadvi, author of the highly regarded *She'ar-ul Hind* (1926) mentions Dakani as proto-Urdu poetry in a sort of prefatory opening chapter, but does not discuss it as legitimate "Urdu Poetry." Only in his second chapter does he designate a "First Period of the Ancients and Urdu Poetry's Commencement in Vali." In fact, the earliest body of Urdu critical literature pertaining to Dakani poetry seems to have been produced in the 1930s and 1940s by Haidarabadi scholars themselves. None of their work is available in translation, nor is it widely accessible in Urdu in the north.

Muhammad Sadiq (a northerner) opens discussion of Dakani in his *History of Urdu Literature* by saying that it is "so excessively archaic that a layman can neither understand nor appreciate it. For the student of Urdu literature it can at best be an acquired taste and no more."

In these remarks Sadiq gives voice to conventional wisdom concerning Dakani, which in turn springs from consideration of questions of whether or not non-Mughal, non-Dihlavis could produce cultural products of an acceptable kind to the Mughal-identified Urdu elite. In other words, can Dakani Urdu be considered refined enough to be called classical? It is not a frivolous question because the stakes are very high.

The ways in which Dakani is perceived to differ from the Dahlvi *ghazal* have played a large part in this literature's neglect. Dakani is considered distinguishable from the profile of classical Urdu poetry in the two key aspects of language and content. Linguistic variations are of little concern here, except insofar as they eliminate the possibility of Dakani's claims to refinement or "purity" but differences in content are crucial. In such critical literature as discusses it, the Dakani *ghazal* is characterized by a relatively high incidence of requited love; and by the presence of a female narrator in a significant portion of verses. While the question of requited love is serious for a poetic aesthetic of Love in Separation—and that is the characteristic aesthetic of the Urdu *ghazal*—it is this female narrator-Lover ('*ashiq*'), I believe, who represents an overwhelming obstacle to the Dakani *ghazal*'s inclusion in the literary canon. She is at the center of the gap in the canon which should be occupied by Dakani poetry, and her face and voice have been removed from view.

It is my contention that Urdu critics of northern India have gone to some pains to paint irreconcilable differences between Dakani and the better-known Urdu poetry of the north, or have ignored Dakani altogether in order to form a cultural reality—albeit metaphorical—around this northern *ghazal*; and that gender has been a crucial factor, manipulated to gain these ends by placing Dakani in a "feminized" category. Critics have tried to explain the female narrator in two equally unsatisfactory ways: 1) they have called her a manifestation of Hindi poetry; and 2) they have called her verses *rekhti*. Finally, I suggest that the motivation conscious or not, for this manipulation has been compelling beyond that of regional rivalry between North and South: Urdu's modern survival is at stake. Nearly half the literature of a three-hundred year tradition has been sacrificed for the cause of preserving a metaphorical image of Urdu best conveyed by the later *ghazal*, in much the same way that Lucknow was sacrificed by critics a hundred years ago. Consideration of what has been relinquished is essential to an understanding of the cultural reality conceived by literary critics, and to understanding the image of that reality reflected in the canon. These arguments proceed from the close, text-based examination which follows of the '*ashiq*'s persona in the Urdu *ghazal*.

The value placed on Dakani literature diverges within critical discourse—some critics arguing for its inclusion in the canon and others disinclined—but the female narrator remains problematic and central to both mainstreams of critical thought. It is perhaps not so very surprising that the majority of critics arguing for Dakani's place in the classical canon (pro inclusion), and those rejecting it (con), happen to have been generally associated with either the Deccan and northern India, respectively. It is noteworthy that certain criteria of legitimacy are uncontested, and perhaps paramount among these is that Urdu classical poetry must be modelled on its Persian ancestor. One contemporary scholar sympathetic to the Dakani cause writes of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah that he

"adopted the metres, form and to a large extent the subject-matter of the Persian lyric to his own language... [by the end of the Deccan's seventeenth century efflorescence] the *ghazal* remained the most favoured genre; and was rivalled in popularity only by the *masnavi*, which in form and metre closely resembled its Persian counterpart..."

That the author of these remarks is interested in seeing Dakani literature integrated into the canon is suggested by the fact that he begins his survey of Urdu literature with Dakani's poet-kings. This survey is a concise, abridged work necessarily selective in the material it covers, so inclusion of these poet-kings represents a choice. It is also noteworthy that the terms in which this author discusses Muhammad Quli and another poet-king of the Deccan, Ibrahim Adil Shah, are quite consistent with the ideology of promoting Urdu literature as Indo-Muslim cultural signifier. For example, the discussion focuses on the *ghazal*; it emphasizes adherence to Persian poetic models; and it reiterates the noble nature of literature by reminding us that kings are poets; [it dismisses predecessors in the Deccan who might not fit the classical criteria quite so well.] In other words, advocates for Dakani literature are not challenging the canonical image of cultural reality; rather, they seem to be suggesting—with little or no success to date—that Dakani actually fits that image.

The supremacy of the later Dihlavi *ghazal* as established by early literary critics is not challenged in the above remarks, and its pre-eminent legitimacy is tacitly acknowledged in the language of further descriptions of Muhammad Quli's verse:

"...the majority of these poems are simple, almost naïve, expressions of love for a woman. In most cases, the lover is the king himself and love is invariably required... Muhammad

Quli's verse has little to do with spiritual devotion, and the lady's love is of a very earthly kind..."

Perhaps the primary characterization of the Dihlavi *ghazal* in literary criticism is that it is spiritual, even Sufistic in nature. Both the identity and the gender of the beloved are ambiguous, because in Sufi poetry the beloved is ideally divine. Poetry which "has little to do with spiritual devotion" and where "the lady's love is of a very earthly kind" seriously challenges the profile established for the classical *ghazal*. Simplicity, on the other hand, is a highly valued and much-touted feature of the Dihlavi *ghazal*. Certainly, it has been a crucial point of distinction from Lakhnavi poetry by exponents of the Two-School theory. The author of these remarks seems to be arguing for Dakani as a prototype to classical poetry, a literature heading, so to speak, in the right direction, if not yet actually fulfilling all the criteria of the classical *ghazal*: it has the simplicity and naivete, if not the spirituality and ambiguity necessary.

As far less sympathetic treatment of Dakani verse is to be found in Muhammad Sadiq, who at least suggests by his remarks why Dakani may not be accepted by northern critics. He implicitly undermines Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah's credentials by saying:

"In some respects he is a landmark in the history of Urdu poetry; for he is the first to introduce a secular note in a poetry which had been so far mainly religious. He writes of love, nature and the social life of the day, quite a large number of his poems being about flowers, fruits, vegetables, gardens, or the popular customs and festivals of the day. *On the whole it is the poetry of a gay monarch with unlimited scope for self-indulgence...of all that pertains to the mind there is no trace in him.* And no wonder. Living in regal splendour, what occasion could he have for thought?"

In addition to the colonial discourse on Indian monarchy echoed in these remarks Sadiq also holds to the values of the Mughal-identified discourse of Urdu criticism. He argues that the *ghazal* was not as popular in the Deccan as was the *masnavi*, and that the Dakani *ghazal* does not follow the Persian prototype. In fact, Sadiq writes that "*in conformity with the Hindi tradition* love is professed by women and not men." Poetry conforming to the Hindi tradition cannot make a very good case for inclusion into the classical canon of Urdu. This is arguably the most damning characterization of Dakani that could be made.

Urdu critics consistently emphasize this crucial feature of the

female narrator, or *ashiq*. In Urdu literature the descriptive expression, found and over again with little exception, is "*aurat ki taraf se jazbat ka izhar karna*" (literally, "expression of passions or emotions from the woman's side").

It is important at this point to reiterate that there have been no female poets canonized in Urdu. There have not, until the latter half of this century, even been any recognized woman writers in Urdu. Nor does the Urdu audience inherit any sort of female writing from the Perso-Arabic tradition. But conventionally and in material fact, the Urdu *ghazal* has been a male product: the poets are men, the *ashiq* (narrator-Lover) is male, and the Beloved (*ma'shuq*, *mahbub*) is either a man or God (and it is safe to assume that the Divine is not considered female). Even when the Beloved's physical attributes are described in the Urdu *ghazal*, and clearly indicate a female person, she is referred to as "he".

Not so with Hindi poetry (and by "Hindi" I believe that indigenous writings in numerous Indian languages is intended). While there are crucial differences between Indic/Hindi and Urdu poetry, a crucial similarity must be reiterated, viz. that there is in both poetic traditions a blending of the erotic with devotion. In both, the devotee is human and the beloved divine. Furthermore, in both bodies of literature their relationship is primarily one of Love in Separation. In Hindi poetry this relationship is known as *viraha* and in Urdu it is called *firaq-i yar*. Significant differences are 1) that Islam does not anthropomorphize the Deity as Hinduism sometimes does; 2) also that in contrast with Urdu, within the Indic tradition there is also the motif of physical union with the divine beloved, especially in Radha-Krishna poetry (in the *Gita-Govinda*, for instance, the narrative conflict between these two estranged lovers is resolved through physical union, and culminates in a night of celebrated lovemaking); whereas in the Urdu *ghazal* even love between humans (referred to as '*ishq-i majazi*, 'metaphorical love') must remain ambiguous and non-corporal in order to serve as a representation of the higher love of humans for the Divine Beloved (referred to as '*ishq-i haqiqi*'). The third—and in the context of the present discussion perhaps most important—difference is that the persona of the narrator in Radha-Krishna poetry is a woman. As Milton Singer has discussed, the poet and devotee identify with Radha, they try to become Radha. And therein lies the problem of a female narrator in the Urdu *ghazal*.

A female '*ashiq*' representing, in effect, a blasphemy, can only be accounted for either as a presence borrowed from Hindi tradition, or as a voice from the 'lesser ranks' of Urdu literature. On the one hand the female narrator has caused the Dakani *ghazal* to be labelled

“Hindi” poetry. On the other hand she has caused the term “*rekhti*” to be applied by twentieth century critics to early Dakani *ghazal* poetry.

Rekhti is a sub-genre of Urdu poetry written in *ghazal* form in which the narrator is a woman, and where the narrative idiom, too, is said to be that of women (“*auraton ki boli*”). *Rekhti* is set in gendered opposition to *rekhtah*, (by which standard Urdu *ghazal* poetry is known) and seems to have become equated with any poetry having a female narrator, regardless of poetic diction.

The following is a description of the term “*rekhti*” given by Platts’ *Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi and English*:

(from *rekhtah*), s.f. Hindustani verse, written in the language of women and expressing the sentiments, etc. peculiar to them.

Rekhtah, derived from the Persian past participle *rekht* (“poured out, scattered, mixed”), is defined by Platts’ *Dictionary* as “the Hindustani or Urdu language as used by men; a Hindustani ode; mortar, plaster.”

The following verse from the great poet Ghalib should provide a sense of the status attached to *rekhtah* in idealized Indo-Muslim culture:

Rekhte ke tumhiñ ustad nahiñ ho Ghalib
Kahte haiñ agle zamane meñ koi Mir bhi tha

Ghalib, you’re not the only
 master of *rekhtah*:
 They tell me in another time
 There was someone else
 called Mir

Rekhti refers, then, to a sub-genre of the Urdu *ghazal* in which the narrator is female. It is diminished and distinguished from the main body of Urdu *ghazal* poetry, referred to as “nothing more than a spinoff” of *rekhtah*. *Rekhti* has caused consternation of Urdu literary discourse from time to time because of its association with female love. To make a long story short, this is a much maligned body of poetry. It is generally considered disreputable. The major discussion available in English is again from Muhammad Sadiq. He speaks of it in the context of the Lucknow court as a “new type of poetry” based on “increased knowledge of women, especially to the lower order” and declares that it is

“much more euphemistic, much less literary and therefore more racy and sparkling than the speech of men. *Rekhti* has...a flavour of its own. It tickled the palate of the dandies

and rouses and its choicest morsels were treated as a species of aphrodisiac."

Sadiq says a fair bit more on this poetry, including the conventional wisdom that it was invented by the Lakhnawi poet Rangin (1756–1834) but summarizes his discussion of *rekhti* by saying that although "a whole world of things has been drawn upon...the core of it, its piece de resistance, is sexual intimacy and suggestiveness."

However, this Dakani "*rekhti*" is considered legitimate poetry. An important distinction between the context in which Dakani *rekhti* is posited, and that in which Lakhnawi *rekhti* discussed, is that notions of obscenity, titillation, raciness, lower diction and the like do not enter into discussions of Dakani *rekhti*. Nobody suggests that the women narrating these verses are "of the lower order," to recall Sadiq's description of *rekhti*. In fact, older critics such as Tamkeen Kazmi writing in 1930, and Muhiuddin Qadir Zor writing in the 1940s, refer to the *rekhti* of early Dakanis as fundamentally different from that of Lakhnawi *rekhti* poets like Rangin and Insha for precisely this reason: while this may appear to be *rekhti* because "love (*'ishq*) is expressed from the woman's side," they argue, "this type of *rekhti* is not based on lasciviousness and baseness, in contrast to the style of Insha and Rangin."

But there is no place for non-*rekhti*, non-Hindi poetry with a female narrator. On the one hand, this Dakani poetry is not "normal" *rekhti* because it is not essentially obscene; on the other hand, the Hyderabad critic Badi Husaini contends that, while *rekhti* is an essentially legitimate poetic form, not necessarily based on lewdness, it is not *ghazal* poetry. Badi recounts, for instance, Maulana Azad's query about "whether or not, fundamentally, anyone has determined that '*ishq* can be [expressed] from a woman's side, since that is a characteristic of Hindi poetry..." (And the expression of '*ishq* is solely the domain of Urdu poetry, or *rekhtah*). He also quotes the Lucknow critic Abdul Halim Sharar as saying that "Urdu poetry has always been in men's language to the extent that even if women speak [*ghazals*], they speak as men..."

But Badi' argues that neither is *rekhti* Hindi poetry. He refuses to designate *rekhti* as a product from outside the Urdu literary tradition. He quotes other distinguished Urdu critics in arguing that the conflation of *rekhti* and Hindi poetry is completely erroneous, despite the fact that both kinds of verse do sometimes share the crucial elements of women's idiom and the expression of sentiment from a woman's point of view. He quotes Andalib Shadani, for example, as saying that "if this writing [in which the woman is the '*ashiq* and the man the Beloved (*ma'shuq*)] is *rekhti*, then all of Hindi poetry is *rekhti*,

but no one has ever, to this day, called Hindi poetry "*rekhti*". In other words, if *rekhti* is Hindi poetry, then Hindi poetry must be *rekhti*.

Neither is *rekhti ghazal* poetry, according to some critics, nor is it Hindi poetry, according to some others. Badi's critique of other critics elucidates a crucial fallacy of their formulations, one that he himself is unable to escape altogether: *Rekhti* has been aligned with Hindi/Indic on the basis of content, while *rekhtah* has been distinguished from Hindi/Indic poetry on the basis of form: because *rekhtah* follows the rules of Perso-Arabic prosody. This reasoning calls into question the definition of *rekhti* as the feminine of *rekhtah*, and raises the predicament of how Urdu critics are to locate *rekhti* in any poetic tradition at all. The final irony is that whether *rekhti* follows the rules of Hindi/Indic poetry, or those of Persian, never enters the discussion.

As to what *rekhti* expresses, critics seem to agree that it is not *ishq*, but something else, *jazbat*. The term "*jazbat*" does not have a clear definition, and does not even appear in most standard Urdu dictionaries. While informally it might be translated as "emotions or sentiments," the one dictionary entry, found in a modern Urdu-Urdu dictionary, defines "*jazbat*" as "a collection of "*jazbah*." *Jazbah* is, in turn, defined as "passion, rage, fury, violent desire." It is important to note that the term "*jazbat*" must be deliberate choice of critics, because it is the one term used by numbers of them to describe what the female narrator expresses in Urdu poetry, be that poetry *rekhti*, or be it poetry written in the Deccan "following the Hindi tradition." It is also noteworthy that Muhammad Sadiq's discussion of *rekhti* says that "in it a woman is made to relate to a confidante her own side of the story..." What is clear is that women are not generally seen by critics of Urdu to express what men express, that is, *'ishq*. What women express is sentiment, passion, rage or fury. The connotations of these words, again, removes female poetic expression from *taghazzul* or "*ghazal*-ness," the social and ideological heart of the lyric. And even Badi, Husaini and the few other critics who are made uncomfortable by *rekhti*'s association with obscenity or lasciviousness, but who view the genre as legitimate within the tradition, still use the word "*jazbat*" for what the female narrator expresses, instead of "*ishq*".

A problem arising from this line of reasoning is that *rekhti* and this female-narrated Dakani poetry are, for different reasons, clearly recognizable as belonging to the Perso-Arabic tradition. The Dakani verses seem to fall well within the characteristic aesthetic of *ghazal* poetry, and *rekhti* clearly conforms to *ghazal* prosody. This is not to say that much of the vocabulary in these Dakani verses does not employ Hindi vocabulary; or that there are not resonances of *viraha*, the

Indic poetic tradition's motif of love in separation. They are readily apparent in the following verses of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah:

*Kahuñ apan birah kis kan agin sho'le pare is tan
so mushkil datiya muj man haman dukh koi suna se na*

Were I to speak to anyone
about the burning tumult of separation
its flames would scorch that body
and so I keep it
locked in my heart.

*Magar kho'e khuda yeh dukh dikhaye us suraj ka mukh
andhare nayand pave sukh to muj par dukh daha se na*

But let God lose me this sorrow
and show me the face of that sun:
if solace could come to these darkened eyes
sorrow would burn me no more.

From another *ghazal*:

*Mu ah-o nalah tab the dikhaya milan ghari
U naqd-i 'umr men do nafas dar hisab tha*

When my sigh and lamentation
signalled the hour of union,
Those two breaths constituted
a full accounting of my life.

There was nothing in the sentiments expressed in these verses which ran against the grain of *taghazzul*, or the *ghazal's* expression of '*ishq*. On the contrary, the last verse especially could have been written by any of a number of Urdu *ghazal* poets. The vocabulary is overwhelmingly Perso-Arabic except, on the one hand, the words *Milan* (meeting, union) and *ghari* (time, moment); and, on the other, the Dakani pronouns *mu* for personal possession and *u* for the third person *us* in modern Urdu. The overall sense of the verse is that a bereaved lover's sighs and lamentations take on such significance that they both signal the end (the only time of life when union with the Beloved is really possible, as in "meeting one's Maker") and stand for all that has been meaningful in the Lover's life. This not only fits the *ghazal's* Sufistic notion of the duality of union with the Beloved, but manifests a most *ghazal*-like wordplay as well. The word *nafas* for example, is not just any breath, it echoes the word *nafs*, the breath of life, the soul or spirit. Equating sighs and lamentations (*ah-o nalah*) with life's breath (*nafas*) sounds like a classic expression of '*ashiqi*.

The first two *she's* ("*Kahuñ apan*" and "*Magar kho'e khuda*") bear resemblance to the Hindi poetic expression of *viraha* in, for example, the flames of fire engulfing the narrator's body; and in the non-Persian, non-Arabic words *birah*, *suraj*, *sukh* and *dukh*. However, while the word for fire is *agin*, related to the Sanskrit *agni* and the Hindi *aag* the word used for flame is Persian, *sho'ala*, and it, too is employed in a fashion completely conventional to the Urdu *ghazal*, or *rekhtah*.

The argument here is that it is not the poetic sentiment expressed in these verses that distinguishes them from '*ishq*' in the eyes of the critics, but rather the implications of a female narrator expressing '*ishq*' that makes them call these verses *rekhti*.

As it happens, the author-proclaimed *rekhti* of Insha and Rangin does manifest a very different aesthetic than the nobility associated with '*ishq*'. Below are offered a few verses for comparison, taken from a standard teaching anthology. Insha's *rekhti* selection opens with the following:

Baji tum chahti ho bandi se kaisa ikhlas
Aji do kuwariyon meñ noj ho aisa ikhlas

Sister, the affection you desire of this humble servant
God Forbid such affection should exist between two maids!

A few others from a single *ghazal*:

Yeh ghata rat ko cchai kih Ilahi taubah
minh ne voh ankh dikhai kih Ilahi taubah

God! such clouds spread over last night
God, but didn't the rain glower!

Begama, rah meñ aj ek pari ne mujh se
ankh aisi hi larai kih Ilahi taubah

Ma'am,
on the way over
what looks didn't that fairy
cast me today!

Teri faryad karuñ kis se zanakhi tu ne
yeh miri jan jalai kih Ilahi taubah

To whom can I complain of you, *zanakhi*
God, but hasn't your harshness burned my heart!

Mere muñh se jo kahiñ nam suna Insha ka
tu ne yeh dhum machai kih Ilahi taubah

If ever you heard Insha's name from my mouth
God, what a ruckus you raised!

As one might imagine, the translation notes have a number of rather interesting things to say, as well as some rather interesting evasions, concerning the specific verses just presented. They need not be gone into in detail here, but suffice it to say that they make clear—as do such terms of address as *Baji*, *zanakhi*, and *Begama*—that not only is the narrator of these verses female, so is the person addressed in them. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of *taghazzul's* plaintive tone in these verses. The one verse that comes closest (*teri faryad karuñ kis se*) is “corrected” by the insertion of the term of address, *zanakhi*, a term which, though eluding felicitous translation, connotes great affection, even intimacy. There is no doubt that these verses are much racier, to borrow Sadiq's term, and it is also easy to understand why critics advocating the legitimacy of the Dakani's female-narrated *ghazal* poetry might be eager to disassociate that poetry from this.

In fact, it is a little surprising that the two styles ever got confused with one another, and the only critical voice is dissent is that of D.J. Matthews, whose work is largely inaccessible. The confusion has to do, I would suggest, with the construction of gender in society, rather than a particular gendered emotion in these verses. And it has to do with the distinction between idealized notions of love (*'ishq*) and those concerned with the base impulse of sexuality.

The word *haq*, from which *haqiqi* derives, is one term of reference for God, the divine being the absolute Truth. While *'ishq-i haqiqi* can refer to passionate feelings, it cannot refer to carnal love. And *haq* is masculine. *'ishq-i majazi*, “metaphorical, allusive” love, referring to the love human beings have for one another, also uses the convention of referring to the love human beings have for one another, also uses the convention of referring to the beloved in the masculine. So, in classical Urdu love poetry, both the lover (*'ashiq*) and the beloved (*ma'ashuq*) are conventionally male. (In ironic contrast to the *rekhti* just read, this male-male scenario is not considered obscene, nor even problematic.)

In this construction of love, then, which is lyrical and noble in nature, there is no feminine. Women are associated, rather, with Man's baser instincts. These baser instincts are certainly acknowledged to exist, but they are in no way idealized. On the contrary, the feelings which women inspire in men are a distraction from the perceived Human Purpose, (*haqiqat*) to unite with the Divine. Celebration of this endeavor is what the *ghazal* is all about, and what makes this poetry a legitimate cultural signifier.

Since *'ishq* is a masculinized concept, there is no place for the feminine in the Urdu *ghazal*, or *rekhtah*. Any female presence in Urdu poetry must render that poetry *rekhti* or Hindi.

The concept of *parda* (*purdah*) provides a useful metaphor for removal of love associated with women from literary view. While it would not be appropriate to go into a detailed examination of the rather extensive literature on *parda*, a few general points can be made which are quite relevant to the present discussion. A commonly cited reason for the practice of veiling women is that it protects them from unwanted attention, and it protects men from inappropriate feelings. This sort of discussion may be placed within the discourse of *parda* as a system of "symbolic shelter," as discussed by Hannah Papanek. Inger Boesen says of *parda* that "while it may be perceived as a device for sheltering the vulnerable woman from male aggression, it may just as well be interpreted as 'sheltering' her husband's vested sexual interests in her from being jeopardized through the woman's own sexual aggressiveness or initiative towards other men".

Boesen correctly implies that women are not necessarily passive potential victims of male sexuality, that they may have sexual feelings of their own. But official discourse on *parda* is inclined to focus on male sexual aggressiveness, and female sexuality, present only implicitly, is assumed to be strictly passive in character. This same focus is shared in official discourse on love poetry.

Recall now that the language by which female expression is denoted in literary criticism is "*jazbat ka izhar karna*." *Izhar karna* is an interesting expression, especially when juxtaposed against the notion of *parda*, which is defined as follows:

"a curtain, screen, cover, veil, anything which acts as a screen, a wall...secrecy, privacy, modesty; seclusion, concealment; secret, mystery, reticence, reserve: screen, shelter, pretext, pretence..."

"*Izhar karna*", by contrast is defined as "to disclose, to reveal, expose; to publish, make known, notify; to declare, to display, affirm, explain..."

In other words, expression (*izhar*) is the opposite of what women are supposed to do. Not only are men not supposed to be contemplating women when involved in the pursuit of *'ishq*, women are certainly not supposed to take an active role in its expression. When they do, they are revealing, exposing, making public, making a display of areas of human impulse about which appropriate response is reticence, reserve, secrecy, mystery—from which men have gone to great lengths to protect themselves. It is reasonable, I would argue, to extend the "symbolic shelter" provided men by veiling to the realm of poetic

expression as well.

As Hannah Papanek noted recently in a discussion of veiling women. "Both the rejection and the revival [of purdah] are founded on ideas of national identity and stress the central importance of women in the symbolism of nationhood." Let us return to the idea that Urdu literary discourse is concerned with far more than just the exploration of literary aesthetics; that it is, in fact, negotiating through urdu literature for a place in the cultural heritage of present day South Asia.

In a geographic area as culturally diverse as South Asia, Urdu may be the only language, one might say, that has no real home of its own, whereas languages such as Punjabi, Gujarati, Tamil, Bengali, Maithili, Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Sindhi, etc. have sub-cultures grounded not only in language but in specific geographical regions. In a forthcoming article considering whether there is a thing as Urdu folklore, Kathryn Hansen writes:

"First of all, the community has no geographic focus; the former concentration of speakers in the northwest of greater India was dispersed by Partition, and so far a distinctive regional identity associated with Urdu has not developed in either India or Pakistan. Second, Urdu has been tied to courts and an aristocratic lifestyle more than most South Asian languages and even in its twentieth century phase, its literature remains close to the experience of the upper and middle classes of urban Muslims...Urdu is neither the language of a nation, nor of a religion, nor of a region—and insofar as it defines a literary tradition, its distinguishing sign is its script..."

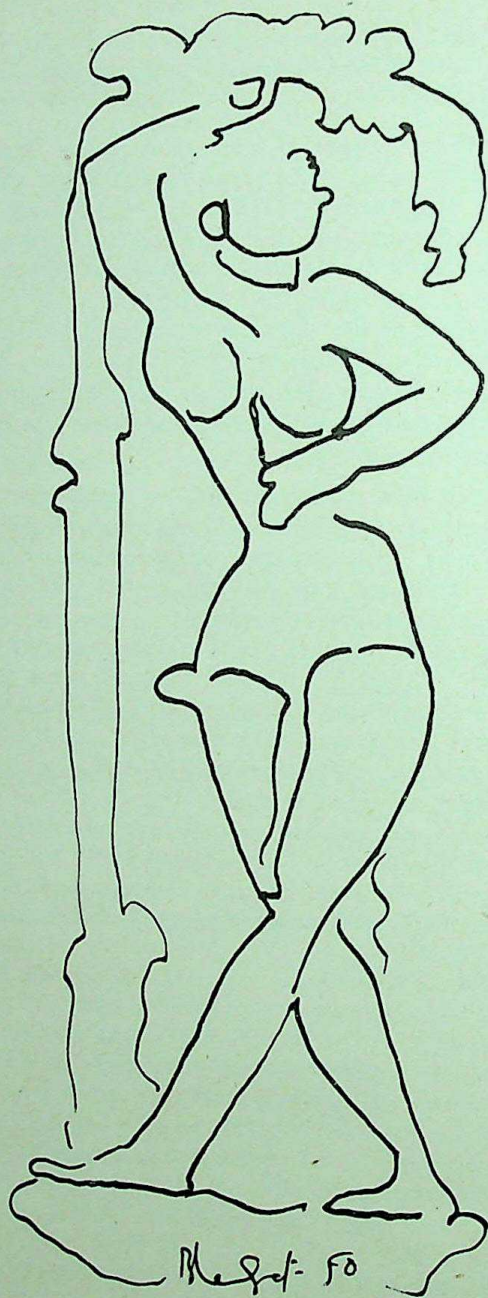
While one may quibble with whether or not Urdu has been associated "more than most South Asian languages" top courts and an aristocratic lifestyle, this association is certainly maintained and safeguarded in Urdu literary discourse, as discussed in the opening passages of this paper. In contrast with its history in the early part of this century, when the Nationalist movement held sway in literary discourse, Urdu now faces serious competition in present day India and Pakistan (and perhaps to a lesser extent also in Bangladesh) from assertive regional cultures and languages. It is engaged in a struggle with Hindi, for example, over which language can claim cultural products predating modern standard Hindi and Urdu, and which have not yet been canonized in either literature.

Urdu culture is under the serious constraint of having to articulate and continue to develop in order to preserve itself and its constituency

in the absence of a regional home of its own. Such constraint requires vigilance. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi wrote recently in the Urdu literary journal, *Shab Khun*:

"Hindiwalas have pounced upon Dakani literature and claimed it as part of their own history. In this way they have taken their own history (which can, with difficulty, claim one hundred years) and made it five hundred years old; and strengthened the attempt to exclude Urdu from this history (let it be understood that this effort began before Independence, gained force after Independence, and has also received support from the government in certain areas)...the scope of the Urdu language has been severely circumscribed and, to a great extent, we have been excluded from the highest level of words and ideas..."

To be excluded from the highest level of words and ideas is the literati's articulation of the very high stakes referred to in the opening pages of this paper. In disassociating Urdu from Dakani because that poetry had a feminized love aesthetic, Urdu critics also removed themselves from a wider Indian intellectual dialogue. The consequences of this exclusionist process of canon formation extend beyond the literary, to the cultural. The statement quoted above may be seen as arguing for a continued "imagining" of Urdu culture within the Indian tradition, lest a proud and significant portions of India's history be "disappeared" from the memory of its modern populace. Whether or not this point of view prevail remains to be seen, and may well depend on whether or not, and how, the place of Dakani and other non-canonical literature is renegotiated by Urdu's literary elite. Will it all remain in the *parda* which secludes it from the canon: and how will Dakani's "female" voice, with all its implications, be accommodated?



The Contemporary Bengali Scene

Indra Nath Choudhuri

The other day I was talking with Sri Annada Sankar Ray, the grand old man of the Bengali literature and a newly elected Fellow of the Sahitya Akademi. I asked him about his impression of the Contemporary Bengali literature. He said that Bengali literature as it is today can be renamed as Bengali commercial literature. I was quite taken aback by this statement. He said, commercialism has already captured the Bengali literary market. Now any good Bengali fiction writer dishes out four novels a year. There are innumerable translations available of the cheap popular western literature. Great literature which can stand the test of time is hardly written these days. It is impossible, said Mr. Ray, for a creative writer to remain original, imaginative and authentic and at the same time produce four novels a year. Gunther Grass he recollected produced one novel in four years. Whether it is Mr. Ray or anybody else, who loves literature understands the danger of commercialism eating into the very fabric of good and serious literature. The most interesting aspect that one notices in the Bengali literature of today is a fierce trend of polarisation due to the onslaught of commercialism. Just as there is a broad demarcation between group theatre and commercial theatre, between Art Film and Commercial Film, similarly a distinct division between the serious literature based on the little magazines and soporific literature of the commercial houses is emerging—a division which was not so prominent up to the end of the sixties. But now the battle line has been drawn with so much gusto that for many up and coming writers of today, commercial magazines, however prestigious they may be, are taboo. What began as an iconoclastic stance probably has now become a conviction. They prefer to remain little-magazine-oriented, though they do not mind writing occasionally in some magazines not too commercial but with a solid financial background. Perhaps the vulgarization of style and fast deterioration of quality in some major poets and powerful novelists, once they joined the Commercial House, was an eye-opener for the new entrants in the literary fields. Maybe novelists like Amiya Bhushan Majumdar, Debesh Ray and Amalendu

Chakraborty and poets like Binay Majumdar, Manibhushan Bhattacharjee and Birendra Chattopadhyay acted as inspirators. But at the same time it would be wrong to say that major writers with commercial interest have lost their literary charisma. Ashish Barman in his recent article on the two worlds of Bengali fiction says that commercialization and the subsequent pressures, both insidious and open have compelled even gifted writers like Sunil Ganguli and Shirshendu Mukherjee to churn out instant novels and then regret in private having written them. He says that talented as they are, at best they try to turn these into light entertainers and, at worst, they spew action which a sensitive mind finds difficult to endure. The number of these quick-fix novels being very high, compared to their own significant works, one often realizes that the general impression among the intelligentsia, even in respect of important novelists is distressingly blurred. This being the reason major poets like Shakti Chattopadhyay and novelists like Sunil Gangopadhyay, Sirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Saiyad Mustafa Siraj are not discussed in serious literary forums but it would be wrong to ignore them. Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Sei Samay* is an ambitious novel of the eighties and is no doubt one of the most significant contributions to Bengali fiction in recent years. Similarly due importance should be given to powerful writers who have commercially made a mark and because of this are generally ignored. The commercial magazines and publishing houses also brought out a few outstanding works in the seventies (*Kuverer Bishay Ashay* by Shyamal Gangopadhyay, *Jadubamsa* by Bimal Kar, *Nilkantha Pakkhir Khonje* by Atin Bandyopadhyay). In the eighties writers like Abul Bashir or Subroto Mukhopadhyay known as renegades from little-magazine groups have undoubtedly excelled in their fictional ventures.

It is indeed significant that the best of the Bengali novels of the seventies and eighties were written far away from the madding crowd of commercial concoctions. Examples, *Antarjali Jatra* of Kamal Kumar Majumdar, *Hazar Churasir Ma* of Mahasweta Devi, *Mafaswali Brillanta* and *Tistaparer Brillanta* of Debesh Ray, *Madhu Sadhu Khan* and *Garh Srikhanda* of Amiyabhushan Majumdar, *Iswaritor Rupkatha* of Shyamal Gangopadhyay, *Gosthobeharir Din O Ratri* of Amalendu Chakraborty, *Nabab-Bandi* of Asim Roy, etc. Out of these novels Mahasweta Devi's *Hazar Churasir Ma* earned for the writer a Pan-Indian popularity. She is a woman of the world—the world of the poor, oppressed and downtrodden. She wrote on Naxalites and works among the tribals and knows their life and problems. She has a dialectical approach to life and blends anthropology, political ideology and humanism, and out of them achieves artistic success. What could

have turned into tract in lesser hands becomes good meaningful literature in her.

A novel does not reflect social life *per se*, it studies an individual too. But we understand that the individual represents and reconciles within him the pressures and tensions obtaining in society. The hero of *The Outsider* (Camus) communicates through his alienation the decadence of war-weary Europe. But unfortunately this alienation, which seems to be an obsessive theme of Bengali fiction throughout the seventies, reads extremely hollow and super-imposed. The trend was set by Samaresh Basu with his *Bibar* during the late sixties. Though it temporarily created a furore, albeit for reasons other than literary, no work of fiction, including Sirshendu's *Ghunpoka*, written along these lines could leave any mark behind. We only chuckle indulgently at the remembrance of *Bibar* or *Prajapati*. And such should necessarily be the fate of any trend or movement—imported from abroad without any root in our soil.

The young Bengali novelists and short story writers, therefore, have altogether shunned such western concepts. What they do instead is simply to write creatively about the people and the places they know about. This, in its turn, has given rise to another interesting phenomenon. The most powerful writers of today are being identified with a particular zone and people. Examples: Dhareswar Chattopadhyay with 24-Paraganas and Sunderbans, Anil Ghorai with Purulia, Bhagirath Misra with Bankura, Afsar Ahmed with village Muslims, etc. In fact the main interest of these writers is to show concern for the neglected regions of this vast country. From the point of view of experience this consciousness is quite meaningful and it helps to understand the real image of the country. In the novels dealing with a particular region and that too the neglected region of the country the living experience becomes a part of it. This experience is varied because of the association of the writer's life with different environments. The cause of Bengali fiction is well served even by this regional approach and this group have matured as the most potent force in Bengali fiction today. One can hardly miss the authenticity, seriousness, sincerity and conviction in their writings. One is also struck by their almost invariable emphasis on rural life. It is almost a return to Tarasankar and Manik, though with a different idiom and a completely new prose style.

In poetry, love is no longer the solar passion of the race. Slowly but surely the nucleus has shifted from the perennial themes of frustrated love or fulfilled love or triangular love. As a matter of fact, the very concept of a nucleus is negated in the poetry and fiction of today. What we find instead is an all-embracing depiction of life in

its totality. The style is subdued, understated and objective, as against the exclusive subjectivism of the stalwarts of the fifties and sixties. The contemporary Bengali poets in their satire and cynicism reflect a total view of their socio-cultural existence. The Gangeo Patro group of poets call it total poetry. What Bishnu Dey said long ago: 'Fear no more the dark/cover your face with my hands' can now evidently be found in the contemporary poetry. This poetic trend known as Uttar-Adhunikta is not a synonym for post-modernism. It is used as a counter-concept to modernism. It is true that Uttar-Adhunikta has arrived in Bengali poetry as a reaction to media-operated and market-guided reality, a reaction to post-modernism of the sixties and even seventies which were linked to a particular way and view of life, common in the western world and increasingly common in the affluent societies of East Asia and Latin America. As a natural consequence here also the new trend is led by such poets who would have nothing to do with commercial magazines. The most vociferous members of this group centre around some little magazines and spearhead a campaign against the smugness and the corrupting influences of the commercial houses. It cannot be gainsaid, however, that this group Kalikrishna Guha, Ranajit Das, Parthapratim Kanjilal and Mridul Dasgupta along with Joy Goswami, Mallika Sengupta and Amitabha Gupta constitute the cream of Bengali poetry today. There may be some more. Now the effort of these poets is to be natural, to be Indian, to be near to the common man, to be socially conscious. These poets have made an effort to retrieve, reinvent and redefine elements of culture in a creative way, by a return to pride in roots, while looking ahead.

However little may be the output, contemporary Bengali drama is quite impressive. Plays written for the contemporary group theatres which are run by the amateurs combine the truth of object with outer reality. On the other side in the regular auditorium the *other theatre* continues with its social awareness giving a new perspective to the function of theatre in society. Commercial theatre has further deteriorated without any creative vision and control. Dramatists like Utpal Dutt, Debasish Majumdar, Manoj Mitra are searching for the 'chariot in darkness' because in contemporary theatre man has been robbed of his metaphor—the metaphor of the invincible soul of man. Bibhas Chakravarti's *Madhab Malanchi Kainya* in the true folk tradition assures us of the re-establishment of confidence in man. Now we can hope that theatre will ultimately help in filling in the gap between literariness and popularity and in re-discovering the beauty and grandeur of the common man's life.

Towards Integrating Science with Spirituality

K. S. Duggal

"My mission is to integrate science with spirituality." This is the precise object with which Swami Rama arrived in the USA. The year was 1969.

Raised in Himalayan hermitages, meditating and undergoing severe ascetic practice of pranayama and hatha yoga, including an arduous pilgrimage to Tibet, the holy land of the lamas, forging his path through forbidding glaciers, and then on his return shutting himself in a cave for eleven long months with just a pinpoint of light penetrating through it, Swami Rama had at last arrived, he had become a true master of yoga.

Swamiji knew that he owed all of his success to his own master whom he lovingly addressed as Babaji. Therefore, standing before his master with folded hands, he asked, "Babaji, what can I do for you?"

"Go to the west. The way I have helped you and given you love, the same love you should give to anyone who comes to you. That will be a good enough offering to me," advised his master, in the tradition of the spiritual saints of the east, who believe in lighting one lamp with another.

Going to the west called for preparation. Orphaned at an early age and then adopted by a recluse and brought up in the dreariness of the severe discipline of the hermitages, Swamiji needed to reorient himself, to acquire proficiency in foreign languages, know more of his own country. Hence he acclimatized himself to the milieu at Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan, Mahatma Gandhi's Wardha Ashram, Sri Aurobindo's International Centre, and also, met with such evolved souls as Maharishi Ramana, Anandamayi Ma, Neem Karoli Baba, and others. Swami Rama did all this and much more; he equipped himself with a medical degree.

Thus, readied, Swami Rama started journeying to Europe and the Far East before he finally landed in the USA where he had his proverbial rendezvous with destiny. He went to the Universities of Hamburg and Frankfurt in Germany, the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, and Oxford University in the U.K. He also visited Japan, where, in

due course, he established a yoga centre.

On his arrival in the USA, Swami Rama stayed in Minnesota. Here he came to know Dr. Daniel Ferguson, chief of the medical hygienic clinic of the Veterans' Administration Hospital in St. Paul. As it happened, one day Swamiji created a sensation by performing the 'miracle' of obliterating his pulse. Dr. Ferguson realized what an astounding feat this was. He was acquainted with the research in the self-regulation of the human body's autonomic functioning being pursued by Dr. Elmer Green and his wife, Alyce, at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas. Dr. Ferguson got in touch with Dr. Green and suggested that the psychophysiology equipment at the Foundation could, perhaps, help throw light on Swami Rama's performance, and asked if they would be interested in undertaking the investigation; and if so, Dr. Ferguson could bring Swamiji over to them.

Interested they were. Reconciling Swamiji's convenience with the availability of the laboratory equipment, 28-30 March 1970 were fixed as dates for the proposed study.

The Menninger Foundation, under the Greens' direction, was currently engaged in research in biofeedback, exploring the mind's ability to control the body and its autonomic functioning, and thus determining the states of consciousness. The Foundation was equipped with the latest equipment such as polygraphs, electrometers, densitometers, monochrometers, photogalvanometers, etc. The Greens had been involved in studying biofeedback since the mid-1960s. They had even been to India, taking a mobile laboratory with them. For years they had been seeking out people whose skill in self-regulation was unusual and as yet unaccounted for.

The Greens, in their Voluntary Controls Project, were not exploring parapsychology: they were mainly concerned "in the physiological domain and its self-regulation by volition." They found that people with extrasensory perception (ESP), those who had unusual inside-the-skin (INS) volitional power, displayed regulation of outside-the-skin (OUTS) energies and gave evidence of psychokinetic phenomena. The Greens had studied Jack Schwarz, a well-known western mystic, and Rolling Thunder, a noted native American medicine man.

When the Greens met Swami Rama, he reminded Dr. Green of "an Italian Renaissance nobleman." In his words: "At six feet one inch and one hundred and seventy pounds, and with a lot of energy for debate and persuasion, he was a formidable figure." Swamiji captivated the researchers at first sight.

As a first step, the Greens gave Swamiji a taste of being wired up. Then they asked him over to their home for a meal during which

they discussed what he was going to demonstrate the next day.

Swamiji was not unaware of the widespread interest in psychic phenomena, especially regarding extrasensory perception and psychokinesis. In the USA itself there were several centres. Some of the well-established centres were the University of Virginia, the City University of New York, the University of California, New York's American Society of Psychical Research, Maimainides Medical Centre, the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man, and the Psychical Research Foundation. Swamiji had himself participated in a study being carried out in the Soviet Union, and he was also aware that there was a great deal of interest in findings in the field in eastern Europe. Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Shroeder's book *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* had just been published.

By way of his first demonstration, Swamiji said that he would increase the temperature of the left side of his right hand several degrees higher than the right side. Accordingly thermistors were attached to the palm of his right hand on the hypothenar eminence and thenar eminence. In Dr. Green's own words:

The Swami and I had been talking about the blood-flow just before the zero time on the graph. I said that it was about time for us to start the experiment, and he answered abruptly, "I have already begun." Associated with our polygraph record was a voice-actuated relay which made a mark on the edge of the record so that we could identify places in the record where talking occurred. When we later looked at the record, we noticed that where he said, he had already begun, deviations had started in the record. In the first minute the temperature dropped in both thermistors. Then the warm (W) thermistor reversed and went up to its original reading and the cool (C) thermistor continued to drop. After three minutes they were about 7 degrees Fahrenheit apart.

We continued talking for a few minutes. Suddenly the Swami said, "Be attentive, I will do something." Caught by surprise, I said over the intercom, "Be attentive." I could not think of anything else to say and did not know what he was going to do.

The record shows that the temperature began going up at both locations on the palm of his hand, and then the C thermistor went down to where it had been, but the W thermistor kept increasing in temperature until it reached 95 degrees Fahrenheit. Eventually the two thermistors

were 11 degrees apart, an increase of 9 degree Fahrenheit over the original temperature difference.

"This was the most difficult feat that I have learnt to perform," said Swamiji. "You mean more difficult than stopping the heart?" Dr. Green asked. "Yes," Swamiji maintained.

Dr. Green did not think so, but after a moment it occurred to him that, perhaps, Swamiji was not wrong. What he had demonstrated was neural control over radial and ulnar arteries in the wrist and over the arterial shunts in the hand, and since they were situated a few millimeters from each other in a section of the central nervous system, the demonstration signified excellent differential control over the normally uncontrolled part of the neural system.

Swamiji now wished to be released. Dr. Green found that the temperature of thermistor C began to rise until it was normal.

After a while Swamiji was asked on the intercom to slow his heart. Swamiji readily agreed. And it was noticed that his heart started slowing down. It went on thus for fifty seconds. It came down to fifty-two beats from seventy-four beats per minute.

Swamiji had so far succeeded in demonstrating his capacity to vary the heartrate, and then slow down the heartrate. Increasing the heartrate is interesting though not very exciting (many others can manipulate it) but slowing down the heartrate was a rare phenomenon. And varying the heartrate indicated that Swamiji "had developed differential control over sections of his heart, just as he had developed differential control over blood flow in his hand." It was an extremely risky feat, as acknowledged later by Swamiji himself.

The next day Swamiji was going to demonstrate stopping of his heart, despite the fact that he was reminded that according to himself one could not undertake this feat unless one had fasted for three days. "Don't worry," he assured the researchers. "I know what I am doing. I can stop my heart for three or four minutes, and also do something no other yogi can do. I can carry on a conversation at the same time." He then asked, "How long a time would be required to demonstrate heart stopping on the machine, since I have not fasted?"

Dr. Green would be satisfied if he did this even for ten seconds. With wires draped over his shoulders Swamiji instructed, "When my heart stops, call over the intercom and say, 'That's all.'" Evidently, since he was not normally prepared for the feat, he wanted to make sure that he did not overdo it. "I want to be reminded to stop," he said, "so that I will not forget what I want to do. I do not want to damage my subtle heart." He later explained that the heart known to surgeons is the physical entity of the energy structure. The real

thing is nonphysical; the physical heart is its concrete appearance only.

Swamiji was seated in a large armchair in which he could squat in the lotus position of the Indian yogis. He started talking about heart control with Dr. Elmer Green, all others being away in the control room. He then quieted down for a while, evidently for the demonstration. A little while later he said, "I am going to give a shock, do not be disturbed." After about two minutes Alyce Green said on the intercom, "That's all." Swamiji drew in his solar plexus and exhaled his breath. His face showed that he had completed the demonstration successfully. There was a glint in his eyes.

At this Dr. Green went to the control room. This is what he found on the curvilinear paper.

The heart had not stopped the way the researchers had imagined it would. Rather it had "fluttered," to use Swamiji's term for it. The pen did not draw a straight line; instead, there were erratic movements of the pen for 16.2 seconds. Later the slides were shown to Dr. Marvin Dunnez, a cardiologist at the Medical Centre of the University of Kansas. "A section of the heart flutters," he observed, using the same word Swamiji had, "in an oscillatory mode at its maximum rate, the chambers not filling properly, the valves not working properly, the blood pressure dropping." Evidently, that was the scientific expression of what in common parlance is called stopping of the heart.

When Swamiji had finished his demonstration, he went upstairs and as if nothing had happened, delivered his scheduled lecture. Then he left for Minneapolis, promising to return for other experiments. He wrote a letter to Dr. Green, listing the various yoga exercises that he would like to perform to verify scientifically the supremacy of mind over body.

One of the studies indicated by Swamiji that intrigued Dr. Green was concentrating on silencing the conscious mind and bringing forward the subconscious mind. At Dr. Green's bidding Swamiji performed the feat without any preparation. The moment he willed, theta waves began to dominate his brainwave pattern. Asked to describe what he experienced, Swamiji replied, "All of the things that other people wanted me to do, all of the things I wanted to do, all of the things I should have done but didn't do, came up and began screaming at me at the same time. It was very noisy and very unpleasant. Usually I keep that turned off, but it is useful to look in there once in a while to see what is there."

Along with demonstrations in the Foundation, Swamiji was undertaking frequent lecture tours. Once when he returned from such a series of talks in Chicago, he showed Dr. Green a "Polaroid picture in which most of his chest was obscured by a disc of pale, pink light."

Asked to explain it, he said that it was possible for a yogi to turn on the *sooksham* (subtle) energy in a halo so intensely that it could be deciphered by the naked eye. When he asserted this during a lecture in Chicago, someone from the audience challenged it and asked Swamiji to demonstrate it so that he could take a picture. Swamiji obliged. Several pictures had been taken, and Swamiji had brought one with him.

Creating artificial tumors and dissolving them with willpower was another assertion listed in Swamiji's letter that interested Dr. Green. Once while discussing it with Swamiji, Dr. Green happened to observe that since "the vascular 'tree' in humans includes smooth muscles in blood vessel walls—which are presumably controlled from a hypothalamic centre—it seemed reasonable to hypothesize that tumors could be volitionally started through blood flow control and absorbed by the body." Swamiji agreed with Dr. Green and said that all the soft tissues of the body could be easily manipulated. Then he went on to demonstrate it. In the words of Dr. Green:

He jumped up and said, "Press on this muscle with your thumb." It was a large volume of muscle in the right buttock, the *gluteus maximus*, just behind the hip bone. He said, "Do you feel any lumps in there?" "No." Then he said, "Wait just a second," and he turned his face to the left, away from me, for three or four seconds. Then he said, "Feel it again."

I pressed the muscle again and discovered a lump about the size of a bird's egg in the muscle. I said, "What is that, a tense muscle, a charley horse?"

The Swami said, "No, it's a cyst." I asked, "What's in it?" He said, "I don't know." "Would you be willing to have it X-rayed?" After a pause he said, "I don't know. My teacher said that it was possible for X-rays to make changes in cells that I might not be able to control." I said, "How about biopsy?" He replied, "Maybe."

Then he said, "Feel it again." I pressed the muscle again and the lump was gone. I said, "It's gone." He replied, "Just a second. I will make another one." He looked to the left side again for three or four seconds, then said, "There is another one." I pressed again with my thumb and found another lump, but in a different place—up against the hip bone. It was vertically longer and also narrower, and as I pressed it against the bone, it slipped this way and that as might be expected of a cyst.... To me it was striking example of mind-body coordination.

The next demonstration related to moving things from one place to another.

Swamiji needed nine days by way of preparation for this demonstration; he had to repeat a mantra 140,000 times. The experiment was arranged in a small room, insulating it from air currents and providing space for six observers. Dr. Green improvised the following apparatus for the experiment:

I brought some aluminium knitting needles, ground their tips to points and glued two of them together at right angles in the form of an X. A small hole was drilled through the place where the needles intersected and the assembly was set on a vertical axle, a steel pin that extended from a plastic block. The plastic block was glued to a 360 degree protractor, so that 'before' and 'after' readings could be taken of the position of the needle assembly. A small bead under the needle assembly provided ample friction to prevent motion due to air currents and yet was free enough to allow easy movement."

Swamiji was in seclusion repeating his mantra until the day of the demonstration. On that day he was absolutely at ease and confident, but he feared trouble about the mask. No one should be able to find fault with it, he insisted. Therefore, Dr. Green "obtained a plexiglass plate and bolted across the foam-rubber insert so that if the air could be blown through the foam rubber, it would be deflected away."

At the appointed time and place the mask was put on Swamiji's nose and mouth and adjusted. He then sat in a comfortable cross-legged position muttering his mantra. A candle had been lit to assist him in concentration. After a little while Swamiji said that the candle flickered and disturbed him. The candle was accordingly extinguished. A brief silence. The mantra again. After about fifteen seconds the mantra concluded with a forceful sound—a command, as it were. The needle rotated.

Everybody was silent for a while. Then Dr. Green got up and examined the needle. It had moved ten degrees.

Swamiji asked if they would like him to repeat the performance. At their bidding he did so, and the needle moved another ten degrees.

As feared by Swamiji, there was at least one person in the company who believed that the needle had been moved simply by a current of air.

"From where?" Dr. Green protested. The skeptic replied, "Let's face it. This is probably the most remarkable person you and I will ever see. He can control blood flow in the palm of his hand, he can stop his heart from pumping blood. He can do things with his breath,

that you and I can't even imagine. I think he did it with air currents."

"But how?" Dr. Green asked.

"How do I know?" the skeptic muttered.

It was, indeed, marrying science with spirituality. It needed men with open minds to acknowledge it. And they were not long in coming forward.

Samuel Moffat, writing under the title "Psychic Boom" in the 1973 *Encyclopaedia Yearbook of Science and the Future*, observed:

Experienced eastern mystics who truly have mastered meditation techniques can do much more than manipulate their alpha waves, however. In 1970 researchers at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, spent several weeks examining an Indian yogi, Swami Rama of Rishikesh and the Himalayas. The Swami could voluntarily maintain his production of theta and delta brain waves. Theta waves (four to seven cycles per second) often appear when a person becomes drowsy and eases towards sleep; delta waves (about one per second with very large amplitude) are usually associated with deep sleep. During one five-minute test, Swami Rama demonstrated theta waves 75% of the time. The next day he deliberately produced delta waves for 25 minutes; he appeared to sleep and even snored gently but afterwards he could repeat almost perfectly things said in the room at that time.

These are not just exercises but have the potential of teaching science some of the as yet unexplained workings of the human brain. When in the theta state (with alpha and beta also present 50% of the time) Swami Rama became aware of many unconscious thoughts he normally suppressed. The Swami maintained that when in a state of deep reverie he could heal himself of certain ailments by giving the body suitable instructions in the form of images. Elmer E. Green, who directed the research at Menninger, also reported that Swami Rama "could diagnose physical ailments very much in the manner of Edgar Cayce (an American psychic who made thousands of medical diagnoses while in hypnotic trance), except that he (Swami Rama) appeared to be totally conscious.

Elmer and Alyce Green documented their findings with Swamiji in an article entitled, "The Ins and Outs of Mind-Body Energy," published in *Science Year: The World Book Science Annual 1974*. A few extracts:

Seated in a chair in our laboratory at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, a 45-year-old Indian yogi named Swami Rama performed an incredible feat. While seven of us watched, the Swami caused a 14-inch aluminium needle, mounted horizontally on a vertical shaft 5 feet away from him, to rotate towards him through 10 degrees of arc."

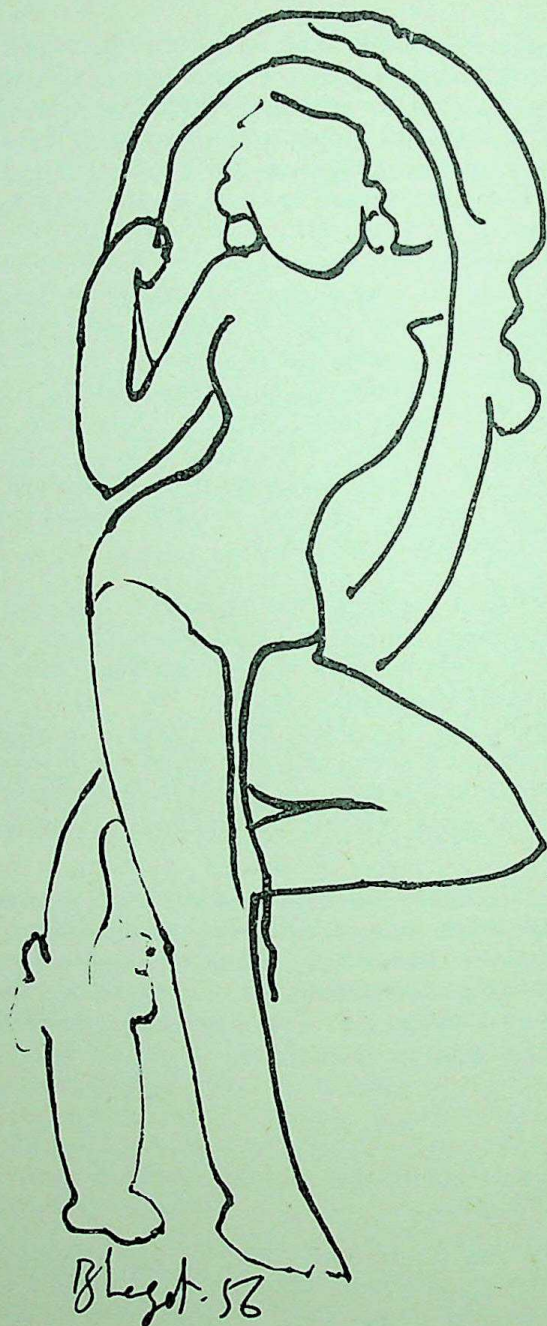
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As with our other subjects, we wired up the Swami to record brain waves, heart behaviour, respiration, skin resistance and potential, muscle tension, blood flow in hands, and hand temperature. He first made the temperature of the little-finger side of his right palm differ from the temperature of the thumb side by 10 degrees Fahrenheit.... Later he demonstrated that he could stop his heart from pumping blood, and could produce specific brain wave patterns on demand.

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We asked the Swami how he controlled his heart and blood vessels, and how he consciously produced various kinds of brain waves at will. He explained that these phenomena were possible because "All of the body is in the mind. But," he added, "not all of the mind is in the body. In other words, each part of the energy structure called the body is literally a part of the energy structure called the mind, although the reverse is not necessarily true.

This is the notable contribution Swami Rama has made to the western thought. He has made the scientists in the west take a serious scientific look at hitherto unexplained yet persistent phenomena evidenced by eastern yogis. In the words of Dr. Green, "In a curious blend of eastern theory and western technology, a new Science of Consciousness seems to be developing."



The Discovery of Telenapota

Premendra Mitra

When Saturn and Mars come together, you too may discover Telenapota. That is, when you, an indifferent angler—never had a catch larger than a *punti*—find, after weeks of slogging, a couple of days' leisure, and someone comes and tempts you, saying that somewhere there is a magical pool in which the world's most simple-minded fish are anxiously waiting to swallow any bait—well, you are already on your way to discover Telenapota.

Discovering Telenapota, however, is not as easy as all that. Late in the afternoon you will have to board a bus packed to its roof with men and things. Once inside, you will be pushed about by fellow passengers, get drenched in sweat and coated with dust. After two hours of such clammy misery you will be suddenly dropped, without any warning.

Before you collect your wits and look around, you will find that the bus is disappearing over a bridge across the low swampy puddle in front. The thick jungle around is dark, as if night was already there, though the sun has still not set. The air is damp and stifling, and the place is eerily quite. There is not a soul in sight. Even the birds have left the place, as if in fright. Your mind will be filled with strange fancies and you will imagine that from out of the marshy morass below some sinister curse is slowly rearing its ugly head.

Leaving the main road and getting to the side of the swamp, you will find that someone has cut a narrow muddy path into the jungle. But even that unformed path gets lost amongst the thick groves of bamboo and big, leafy trees.

To discover Telenapota you should have a couple of friends with you. You, yourself, will be going there for fishing, but what induced your two friends to go, you will not be able to tell.

Your most immediate problem will be mosquitoes. They will come in hordes and you will try to drive them away by stamping your feet on the ground. Not quite knowing what to do next, the three of you will stand there and look enquiringly at one another's faces. Soon it will grow quite dark, and you will not be able to see clearly the faces

of your companions. The buzz of the mosquitoes will become louder and louder and their attacks more insistent. You will start wondering whether you should not try to get to the main road and catch a bus back.

Just then, a weird noise will startle you. It will seem to originate at the point where the mud track gets in the jungle. To your startled nerves, it will appear to be an inhuman cry forced out by someone wringing the dumb wood around. You will become tense, with expectation and waiting. Mercifully, you will not have to wait for long. Presently, you will see, through the darkness, the gentle swaying of a faint light and a bullock-cart will come out of the wood with a slow, rocking gait.

It is a tiny cart and the bullocks are no bigger. You will wonder whether they did not come out of Lilliput. However, you will not wonder for long and the three of you will get inside the covered awning. The space available is small, and you will have some difficulty in accommodating three pairs of arms and legs where there is room for only one: but you will manage it.

The cart will return along the path it had come. The wall of darkness in front of you will appear impenetrable. But, much to your surprise, the thick dark jungle will yield a narrow tunnel-like passage, a little at a time, for the cart to pass. The bullocks will go unhurriedly forward, as if creating with each step the path they slowly tread.

For a while, you will be acutely bothered by having to sit anyhow in the narrow space available. Gradually, however, your limbs will get benumbed. A feeling of being drowned in the deep darkness around will fill you. You will feel that you have left the world you knew far behind and have entered another that was full of mists and empty of all feeling. Time will appear to have stopped.

You will have no idea how long you have had this feeling. Suddenly a racket of beating drums will jerk you into a wide wakefulness. You will find the driver of the cart furiously beating an empty can. You will also see that the stars have come out.

You will ask what the matter was. The driver will reply, most casually, 'Oh, just to drive damned tigers away.' You will be about to ask how it is possible to drive tigers away by just raising a racket, when he will add reassuringly, 'No, not real tigers. Only panthers. Ah, yes. Unless they are really hungry, a can and a stick are all you need to keep them at a safe distance.'

Tigers! Within thirty miles of the big city! Before you have had time to wonder about it, the cart will have crossed a wide moor. The late moon will have, meanwhile, arisen. By its pale light you will see that you were passing through an area full of ruins of deserted palaces

and mansions. A solitary column here, a broken arch there, a wall of a courtyard and a portion of a temple further on—there they will stand like litigants, waiting in futile hope, for the recording of some evidence in the court of Time.

You will try to sit up and a tingling sensation will go all over your body. Once again, you will be overwhelmed with your former feeling of having left the world of the living behind and of having entered a misty world peopled only by memories.

You will have no idea how far gone the night was then. Indeed, it will seem to you that night never ends here and everything lies submerged in a stillness that has no beginning and no end. The whole thing will remind you of those specimens of extinct animals they keep, immersed in acid bottles, in museums.

After a few turns the cart will stop. You will collect your benumbed limbs and get down, one by one—stiff, like wooden dolls. The first thing you will notice is the strong rancid smell. You will guess—rightly—that the stink is of rotting leaves in the pond right in front of you. By its side stand the ruined remains of a big mansion. With its caved in roofs, fallen sides and frameless windows, it stands there like the battlements of a fort, a sentinel against the moon.

You will learn that you will have to spend the night in this house. You will find for yourself a habitable room—comparatively speaking, that is. From somewhere the cart driver will fetch a broken lantern and a jug of water. It will seem to you that ages must have passed since a pair of human feet stepped into the room. Someone had tried to clear the room and rid it of the accumulated dust and dirt, but not very successfully. The musty stench will show that it was done long ago and was even then not welcomed by whatever spirit it was that lived there. On the slightest movement, little bits of plaster and mortar will fall on you from the walls and the roof, like curses from the angry spirit. A few bats will be shrilly questioning all the time your right to be there for the night.

Of your two companions one is toper and the other would have slept through a storm. You will have hardly spread your bed while the second will fall upon his and start snoring, and the third begin to seek the consolation of the bottle.

The night will wear on. Soot will slowly accumulate on the glass of the broken lantern and soon it will shut the light out wholly. As if in response to some mysterious broadcast, all the adult and able-bodied mosquitoes of the region will come out to greet you. If you are a knowledgeable person, you will know from the distinctive manner in which they sit on the walls and on you that they belong to the blue-blooded aristocracy of mosquitoes—the anopheles variety.

the carrier of malaria. By then, both your companions will have become oblivious, for different reasons, of their surroundings.

It will be oppressively hot. Taking the electric torch with you, you will try to escape from it into the terrace. At each step, the danger of a brick of the stairs giving way will try to dissuade you from climbing further. But something will draw you on irresistibly. Ignoring the danger of falling down, you will keep on and finally get to the top.

On arrival, you will find that at most of the places the parapet has come off in bits. In every crack and hole in the walls and the roof, small trees have taken firm root. It will seem as though they were fifth columnists, already there, making things easy for the inexorably advancing jungle.

And yet, by the pale light of the declining moon everything will appear transformed and beautiful. You will fancy that if you only looked long enough, you could find in one of the secret chambers of this sleep-drenched palace the captive princess sleeping through the ages with the golden and the silver wands beside her.

Even as you will be wondering about this, you will notice a faint light in one of the windows of what you had taken to be a totally ruined house, across the street. After a while a mysterious shadow of a figure will come and stand by the window blocking the light. Who could she be? Why should she be awake when everyone else was asleep? Try as you may, you will not be able to know the answers. Looking after a brief moment, you will see that the figure was no longer there and the faint light had also gone out. Was it real, or did you fancy the whole thing? It will seem to you that from the bottomless depth of this world of sleep, a dream bubble had floated silently up for a moment into the world of the living and had as silently melted away.

After a while, you will come down the stairs carefully and fall asleep by the side of your companions.

Getting up, you will be surprised to find morning there already and the place full of the chatter of birds.

You will not forget what you had primarily come here for. Before long you will complete your preparations and find yourself a seat on one of the broken moss-covered steps by the pond. You will throw your line into its greenish waters and wait patiently.

The day will wear on. A kingfisher from the bent branch of the tree across the tank will swoop down, now and again, in a flash of colour. Each time it will return to its perch with the successful catch and, as if to ridicule you, will burst into a frenzy of babble: giving you quite a turn, a fat and long snake will come out of some crack in the steps and get unhurriedly into the water: it will swim across and get out on the other side: two grasshoppers, their glasslike wings

fluttering, will go on trying to land on the float of your line: a dove will call intermittently: its lazy notes will fill you with lassitude and your mind will wander.

You will be startled out of your mood of reverie by the sudden sound of ripples. The still water is no longer still and you will find your float gently rocking. Looking sideways, you will find a woman pushing away the floating weeds and filling up her shiny brass pitcher. There is a curiosity in her eyes, and her movements are easy and free from any awkwardness. She will look straight at you and at your line. She will then pick up her pitcher and turn away.

You will not be able to guess her age. Looking at her face—calm, reserved and sad—you will think that she had already traversed the pitiless road of life; but if you looked at the thin unnourished lines of her body, you will think that she had never grown out of her girlhood.

Even as she is going away, she will turn and say, somewhat suddenly, 'What are you waiting for? Pull hard.' Her voice is so mellow and sweet that you will not think it odd that she—a stranger—should have spoken unbidden to you like that. Only the suddenness of it will make you flustered, and when, eventually, you get the hook out, you will see that the bait is no longer there. You will feel a bit of a fool and will not be able to help looking at her. She will also look at you and then turn and go away with slow, unhurried steps. As she is going, you will think that you saw the suggestion of a bright smile light up her sad and peaceful face.

After this, nothing will disturb the loneliness of the place. The kingfisher, perhaps realizing the uselessness of trying to shame you, will have flown away. Even the fish will ignore you, apparently in contempt for your angling skill. Once again, you will have a feeling that the happening of a moment ago was not real at all. How could there be a woman like that in this land of sleep.

After some time, disappointed, you will collect your tackle and start back. On returning, you will find that news of your fishing skill has reached the ears of your friends. Slightly peeved at their cracks, you will ask how they came to know about it.

'Know about it?' the toper will reply. 'Why, Jamini saw it just now with her own eyes.' Feeling curious you will ask who Jamini was. You will learn that she was the person you had seen at the pond and that she was distantly related to him. You will also learn that you were having your lunch at her place.

Looking at the falling ruins across the street—wherein the shadowy figures had caused you such wonderment the night before—its wretched condition will give you something of a shock. You could

not have imagined that the veil of night, now stripped rudely by the harsh light of day, could have concealed a nakedness so ugly. You will be surprised to learn that that was where Jamini lived.

It will be to one of the rooms in that house that you will go for your lunch. It will be a simple meal and Jamini herself will serve it. As you had noticed before, there was nothing awkward or ungainly about her demeanour. Looking at her now at such close quarters, you will also be struck by the sad immobility of her face. It was as though all the mute agony of this forgotten and deserted place had cast its shadows across her face. Her eyes will seem to be submerged in a sea of infinite tiredness. It will seem to you that one of these days she herself will dissolve slowly, very slowly, into these ruins.

You will notice that even while she was serving, Jamini seemed to have something on her mind. Maybe, you will also hear an occasional faint voice calling from a room upstairs. Every now and then Jamini will leave the room rather hurriedly. Each time she returned, the shadow of suffering in her face will appear to have deepened and her eyes will betray a helpless anxiety.

After finishing your meal, you sit down to rest awhile. Jamini will hesitate a few times, and then call out, in desperation, from the other side of the door, 'Mani-da, could you please come over here once?' Mani-da is the toper. He will go to the door, and the conversation that will follow will be loud enough for you to overhear.

Jamini's voice is greatly troubled. 'Mother is being troublesome again. Ever since she learnt that you were coming with your friends, she has become quite unmanageable.'

Mani will reply somewhat irritably, 'Bother! I suppose it is that old notion of hers? She believes Niranjana is here?'

'Yes. She goes on repeating—"I know he is here. He hasn't come up to see me only because he is embarrassed. Go, fetch him. Why are you keeping things from me?"—Mani-da, I really don't know what to do. Ever since she became blind she has become so irritable. She won't listen to anything. Flies off the handle all the time. I am sometimes frightened that she will die in one of her fits.'

'What a mess! If only she had her eyes, I could have shown her that Niranjana was not here with me now.'

The shout of the shrill, angry ghost of a voice from upstairs will be clearly audible this time. Jamini will say in a pleading voice, 'Do come with me once, Mani-da—see if you can make her understand.'

'All right. You get along. I'll be there.'

Mani will get back to the room muttering to himself. 'Why in heaven's name doesn't this old crackpot die? She can't see, she can't use her limbs, and yet she is determined not to die.'

You will ask him what the matter was. Mani will reply in an annoyed tone, 'Matter? Oh, nothing very much. Years ago, she had fixed Jamini's marriage with Niranjan—the son of a distant cousin of hers. The last time the chap was here, was about four years ago. He told her then that as soon as he returned from abroad he would come and marry Jamini. And ever since she has been waiting.'

'Hasn't Niranjan returned?' you will ask.

'Why, of course not. How should he return when he never went at all? Of course, he was lying. He had to, seeing that the old ruin wouldn't let him go. And why should he bother to marry this ragpicker's daughter? Oh, yes! He is married all right and rearing a family. But who's to tell this! She won't believe you, and if she did she would straightway die of shock. Who's going to take the risk anyway?'

'Does Jamini know about Niranjan?'

'Oh, yes. But she can't speak about it to her. Well, let me go and get it over.' Mani will turn to go.

Almost without being conscious of it, you will also get up at the same moment and say, 'Just a second. I'll come with you.'

'You? With me?' Mani will wheel round, plainly surprised.

'Yes. Do you mind?'

'No, of course not,' Mani will reply, a trifle taken aback, and proceed to show you the way.

After you had ascended the dark and broken stairs, you will get into a room that looked more like an underground tunnel than a room above. There was only one window and that too was shut. Coming from outside, at first everything will look blurred to you. After a while you will see that in a large, decrepit wooden cot a shrivelled up woman, wrapped in a torn rag, lay still. By the side of the cot Jamini stood motionless like a statue.

At the sound of your footsteps, the bag of bones will show signs of animation. 'Niranjan? My child! So you are here at last! Could spare a thought at last for your poor wreck of an aunt! You know, I have been keeping death at bay, hoping that you'll be here some day. You won't slip away again like last time?'

Mani will be on the point of saying something but, interrupting him, you will suddenly blurt out, 'No, Auntie, I promise you I won't.'

You will not look up, but you will feel the bewilderment of Mani and the stunned surprise that will break out in Jamini's immobile face. You could not have looked up even if you wanted to. Your eyes will be riveted to the sockets of the old woman's sightless eyes. It will seem to you that two tongues of darkness issued from those empty sockets and licked every inch of your body—to test, to know. You will feel that those few still moments were dropping like dewdrops

into the ocean of time.

You will hear the old woman saying, 'My son, I knew you would come. That is why I am still living in this house of death—counting the days.' The effort of speaking so many words will leave her panting. You will look up at Jamini. You will fancy that somewhere, behind the steely mask of her face, something was slowly melting away, and it will not be long before the foundation of a vow—a vow made up of boundless despair, a vow taken against life and fate—will give way.

The old woman will speak again. 'I am sure Jamini will make you happy, my son. She surely will. There's none like her, even though I, her mother, say it. I am old and ill and out of my senses most of the time. I try her beyond endurance. But does she snap back? No, not once. This graveyard of a place—you search ten houses and you won't find a man—it's only the likes of me, more dead than alive, that you'll find here—and here, Jamini, a slip of a girl, carries on and manages everything.'

Even though you will want to, you will dare not lift your eyes lest someone might discover the tears that have been welling there. Sighing, the old woman will say, 'Promise me you will marry Jamini. If I do not have your promise I will know no peace even in death.'

Your voice will have become nearly choked. You will be able merely to say, 'I promise you. I will not fail you.'

Soon it will be afternoon. The bullock cart will appear once again to take you back. One by one, the three of you will get inside. As it leaves, Jamini will look at you with those sad eyes of hers and merely remark, 'You are forgetting your fishing tackle'. You will smile and reply, 'Never mind! Let them be. I missed the fish this time but they won't escape me the next.'

Jamini will not turn her gaze away. Her eyes, you will see, were lit up with a smile that was full of gratitude and tenderness. Like the white clouds of autumn, it will float across your mind and suffuse it with an ineffable gladness.

The cart will rattle along. The lack of space will not bother you this time: nor will the monotonous creak of the moving wheels sound harsh. Your friends will, perhaps, discuss how a hundred years ago, malaria, like a relentless flood, carried off Telenapota and left it here, in this forgotten borderland of the world of the living. You will not be listening, for your mind will be elsewhere. You will have ears only for your own heartbeats and hear in them the same words, echoed over and over again—'I will come back, I will come back'.

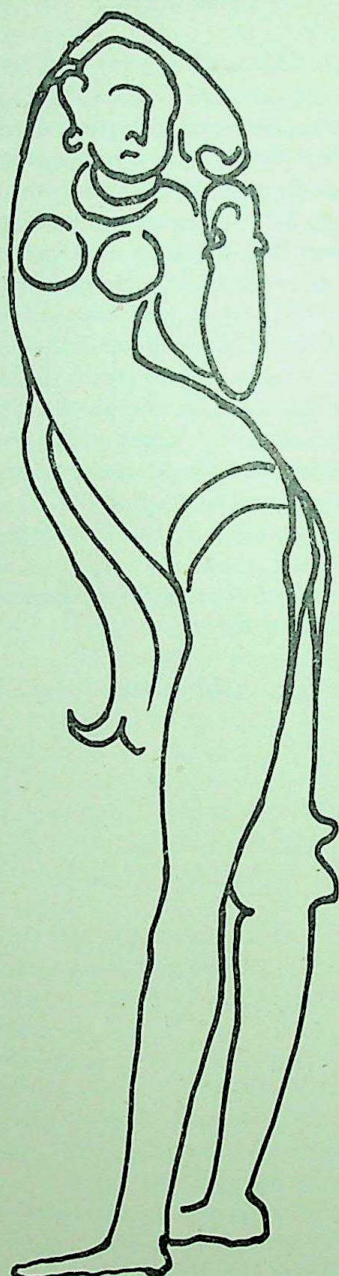
Even after you reach the city—with its hurrying crowds and harsh lights—the memory of Telenapota will be bright in your mind like a shining star—distant yet intimate. A few days will pass with their

petty vexations and troubles. If, in your mind, a slight mist had begun to form, you will not be aware of it. Then, just when you have overcome the obstacles and start preparing to return to Telenapota, you will suddenly feel the shivering touch of the oncoming fever. Soon the headache and the fever will be on you and you will lie down with a lot of blankets. The thermometer will register 105°F and the last thing you will hear before falling unconscious will be the doctor saying, 'Well, well! Where did we pick up this malaria?'

It will be days before, weak and exhausted, you will be able to come out of the house and sit in the sun. Meanwhile, unknown to yourself, your mind will have undergone many changes Telenapota will have become an indistinct dream, like the memory of a star that has set. Was there ever such a place as Telenapota? You will not seem to know. The face that was hard and serene, and the eyes that were far away and sad—were they real? Or, were they, like the shadows of Telenapota's ruins, creatures of the misty realm of your imagination?

Telenapota, discovered for one brief moment, will be lost again in the timeless immensity of night.

Translated from the Bengali by Kironmoy Raha



Pragat-56

Parijata

Lakshmi Kannan

The puja room with the altar inside gleamed. It was so spotlessly clean. All the bronze ware and the copper ware had been cleaned and polished to a burnished glow with the help of tamarind. This particular room, the Prayer Room of the house, is cleaned up meticulously everyday of the year. Swept, swabbed, dusted...All the icons decorated everyday with fresh fragrant flowers, some around the pictures. The brass lamp with the burning wick soaked in oil, together with all the other items used in the ritual of worship, the sandalwood paste freshly ground every morning, the incense sticks burning aromatically, the aarti redolent of camphor. Collectively, they mingled and now a fragrant blend of the smells floated in the room, a pleasant, indescribable odour that hung about the room permanently, giving it a special ambience. It was a fragrance that enveloped you the minute you stepped inside the room.

It was all because of Revati. She took great care of the Prayer Room, cleaning, scrubbing, dusting, with an eye to every detail. Unflaggingly. And everyday. Rajam looked at the room which was spick and span, and thought of Revati, her young daughter-in-law. Her heart softened in gratitude. I'm so lucky, she thought. I'm really lucky to get such a sweet, good daughter-in-law like Revati. She's indeed a fine match for Raghu, my son. Just look at Raghu now, he makes a fine I.A.S. Officer, doesn't he? Raghu and Revati, god bless them...

Rajam got busy arranging the flowers and the other things for the prayer. She wanted everything to be ready before her husband got up. But what's this here? The flowers are so few today, particularly parijata? There's very little parijata. Today is Saturday, a day special for Sri Rama, and Venkatachalapathi. And parijata is a very special flower for these deities. How strange, when we have a big parijata tree in our own garden in full bloom, we don't seem to find enough flowers for our puja. I wanted to take a needle and thread and string the lovely flowers to make garlands for the gods and goddesses, but it's so insufficient. I'll have to be content to offer them as individual

flowers. That's all for today.

Early in the morning, when I looked out of the window, the parijata had rained below the tree in a snowy profusion. It had looked so dense, as if a carpet was spread out there. Looking at the scene, I'd thought, god, what a veritable rain of grace! Raghu's garden is indeed a lush one. Good for him. After all those transfers to obscure small towns, all of us joined him here, in Lucknow. The house is a good one. So is the garden, luxuriously spread out. And yet, just look at the way flowers get stolen in this house. All in the morning. 'She' must have done it, the thief. It is 'she' who has stolen all the parijata. She comes early in the morning everyday, without fail, like a bad omen. I didn't want to look at 'her' face the first thing in the morning. Poor girl, Revati. She too is a married woman who is in the auspicious state of having a living husband. I feel bad asking Revati to talk to 'her', but what can I do? Only Revati can speak in Hindi, so she can effectively drive 'her' out of the garden. Hell, it's such a problem picking your way through this Uttar Pradesh. One can communicate only in Hindi. No other language is understood here. If only 'that woman' knew Tamil, I'd give her such scolding in Tamil that she'll be smarting, yes! Arutthava! (the cursed widow!) The wretched, unlucky woman... a shameless thief, stealing flowers...

"Revati, Revati!"

"Yes mother?"

"Did you notice? Once again, there's very little parijata. You tell 'her' sternly the first thing in the morning tomorrow. Tell her you'll break her legs if she as much as steps into our garden again. That you'll break her arms if 'she' steals our flowers, the brazen hussy!"

"Alright Amma. Has father got up? Shall I make some coffee for you, along with his cup?" asked Revati.

"O.K. Let me hurry up and have a bath. Today is Saturday. I'll have to recite the sahasranamam in the prayer."

There was not enough parijata to string them up as long garlands. Individual flowers dropped on the icons softly as Rajam began her puja. Revati felt sorry that she could not gather enough flowers for her mother-in-law. Mother is so fond of the idea of garlands, let me make the most of what we have here, thought Revati. She took a needle and thread and settled down in a corner of the room to string up the few flowers that were left in the basket. She could manage to make two small garlands which she gave to Rajam. The older woman was very happy to see the garlands. She put one of them on a small icon of Sri Rama and other one on the goddess. Ah! How lovely they look, even in their smallness. A neat, orderly appearance. In the centre of the garland ran the deep-coloured stalk of the flowers, like

a bead of corals strung up on the thread. Breaking up the neat row of coral at regular intervals is the creamy milkiness of the white flowers. What a perfect creation! Revati stood beside her mother-in-law for a moment, taking in the scene.

"Here, wear these flowers in your hair, and keep this kumkum on your brow," said Rajam, offering her daughter-in-law the prasad. Revati received them and left the place to attend to other work.

★ ★ ★ ★

It was the end of September. The early mornings were already turning misty, with a mild fog gathering in the background. Perhaps the mistiness had spread pervasively in this particular area of the town, Lucknow. The place Gomati Sadan, was full of wide open spaces, with the river Gomati flowing nearby. Revati had come out in the garden early, without even drinking her morning cup of coffee. She plucked some bel leaves, some roses and then gathered parijata. I must catch 'her' today, red-handed. Poor mother, all that she had was this small wish for making garlands of parijata. Everyday she feels sorry to see the flowers dwindling, when our tree is actually in full bloom! What's the use of having a big tree in the garden in full bloom when I can't satisfy mother. After I finish with this thief today, I'd be able to fill this basket with parijata. I'll then give mother a basket that overflows with flowers, thought Revati, picking the delicate white flowers from the ground deftly with her fingers, one by one.

But there was no sign of 'her'? Everyday this time 'she' comes so promptly...Revati looked around. The film of mist was quite dense around their house. She could not see anything clearly. And she could not quite remember that female figure clearly either. At this hour in the morning she had such a lot of work to attend to in the house—clean up the puja room and keep everything ready for her parents-in-law, get her little daughter Nitya ready for school, make coffee for Raghu, her husband, pack his office-lunch...Revati would be swept up in the tide of work, briskly. In between the hundred details of the morning frenzy, Revati could snatch a moment to glance out of the windows. She would occasionally catch a glimpse of 'her', quietly stealing flowers. She had vaguely traced a face in the white-clad frame, but from the distance nothing else registered in her eyes. Today she would be seeing 'her' face to face for the very first time.

There was a slight nip in the air. Revati pulled the end of her sari more tightly around herself and looked around at the distance once more. At some distance, she could see the river Gomati rippling like molten silver. A figure in white slowly floated down the road. At first, it was not very clear. One could only see it inbetween the layers of mist, floating down like a cloudy figure in white. Is that 'she', by

any chance? O yes, that's 'she'. There she is! Slowly walking towards the house, heading for the parijata tree. Seeing Revati under the tree she stopped hesitantly. Why, she seems to be a very young woman, thought Revati. With the end of her sari draped over her head like that, Revati had never been able to place her age from a distance. An old woman, she had surmised. Now she noted her face. A bare brow, the face downcast, the body thin. Her feet were bare too. She had draped a white sari around herself. Altogether, a picture of tiredness, of fatigue and yet she had the will and the courage to come here every morning without fail, to steal flowers. Hey you! Revati wanted to say, how dare you come here to steal flowers from our garden? Don't you step on this place again, or else...! Revati looked at her straight, opening her lips to speak but something in that sad face pressed upon her silently.

"Who're you?" asked Revati in Hindi. "Why do you come here everyday? To steal flowers?"

"Ma, I don't steal the flowers, Ma. I only take some," said the young woman, calmly.

"Uh?" Revati looked at her with surprise. The way she spoke Hindi was different. It had a drawl, a distinctly alien accent.

"Are you from this state?" asked Revati.

"No Ma, I'm from Midnapore. It's near Calcutta. A village. My husband came over here. He was working here."

"Was?"

"He's no more," she said, shaking her head.

"Are you alone then? Didn't you wish to return to Midnapore, to be with your people?"

"No Ma. I work in a house here as a servant. They're good people. They've put my son in school."

"How old is your son?"

"Five."

Revati suddenly turned her head to look at the house. God! Has Nitya got up? I'll have to give her some hot milk. Should keep some hot water for my father-in-law, for his bath. And Raghu... Oh, there's such a pile of work waiting for me inside, what am I doing standing here?

"O.K. Now listen. Since you've come, you can take a few flowers. But stop stealing flowers from tomorrow, do you understand? You should never come again from tomorrow, got it?"

"Ma..." she said, looking at Revati straight in the face.

"It's only during this season, from September to November that this flower, parijata, showers down like this so generously. Why can't I take some of it to worship the Lord Krishna? Who's there in the

world for me, except Krishna?" she asked, unhurried in her desolation. There was such a calm firmness in her words. Her young body had wilted and she drooped, even in her youth. O god, why does a woman stand so severely alone and helpless, the minute she becomes a widow? The minute she puts on the widow's garb? Revati looked at the enfeebled woman standing in the cold. She remembered how the woman had floated down the road sometime ago, like cloud in her white saree. Revati opened her mouth to protest but something shamed her into a silence. She just stood there quietly. It was the woman who spoke again:

"Ma, even before you all moved into this house, I used to come to this place to take some parijata. I always used the flowers only from this tree. I don't know why, but my legs drag me up to this place. They've been doing so for some years now. Because parijata is a very special offering for the Lord Krishna, that's why. But now, you're..."

"Alright then, you can take some flowers, but we need them too. So don't just sweep up all the flowers at one go, understand? My mother-in-law needs them for her puja," said Revati.

"Oh! Please forgive me, Ma. Hereafter, I'll take only a small amount. May the Lord Krishna keep you very well," she said.

Revati rushed into the house with the basket of flowers. "Nitya darling, get up. You'll get late for school," she cried out.

"Boo!" said the child, suddenly pouncing on her mother from behind the door where she had been hiding. She laughed merrily to see her startled mother.

"Ah, so you're up already? Have you brushed your teeth? Come along, I'll warm the milk for you," said Revati.

"Mother, I've had milk. Grandmother gave me," said Nitya.

"I see."

Nitya went inside and got briskly involved in work. She first placed the basket of flowers on a large brass tray. Then she swept and swabbed the puja room. The brass and bronze lamps glowed with the tamarind-wash. Revati decorated the lamps with kumkum, poured some oil into them and soaked the wicks in the oil. When she raised her head, she noticed Rajam standing at the door.

"Revati, I'll take care of the rest of the work. You go and look after Raghu and the child," she said.

"Alright, Mother. Why did you bother to warm up milk for Nitya? I'd have done it."

"No bother at all. Poor girl, you were standing outside for so long. 'That' woman there, she was holding you up, making you stand all the while. Some cheek!"

"No mother, she..."

"That's enough for now. Let's talk about her after the prayers are over. It's so inauspicious to talk about 'her' now," said Rajam. Revati went out of the room.

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"Revati, just look at her brazen defiance! Even after you've spoken to her at length. Ché! For an arutthava she's too bold for her own good. It doesn't look nice," fumed Rajam.

"Mother, she's a poor woman. She just sustains herself like this, by worshipping Lord Krishna, counting out her days under the shelter of her god. And parijata is so special for the Lord Krishna, you see. So she just picks up a few flowers. Mother, she can do that only in season, from September to November. As soon as winter sets in, it'll all be over. Please, why do you take it so much to heart?" said Revati.

"Indeed!" exploded Rajam, "She worships Lord Krishna, does she? Who does she think she is, the great Rukmini herself. To take away all the parijata from the tree in Satyabhama's house that bends over to Rukmini's?"

"Mother..."

"Now look here, Revati. You should be more firm with her. Talk to her again and this time, don't mince your words. Just tell her that you'll break her legs if she comes here again."

"Mother!"

"Honestly Revati, even I feel very bad asking you to go and drive her out. I feel awful," said Rajam.

"I know, I know mother," said Revati, her face brightening. "I know that you're actually very troubled by this," she said, a small hope fluttering within her.

Of course I'm sorry," said Rajam. "Won't I feel bad asking you to see the face of a widow the first thing in the morning? O, this is really disagreeable."

"!"

"But what can I do? I'm not able to speak in Hindi. And everyday we're losing our precious flowers, they get stolen. I can't even string them up as garlands, there's simply not enough to go around for all the icons, Ché!"

Revati stood like a statue, stunned.

"Revati, tell 'her' once and for all tomorrow. Be very firm. And don't you worry about the morning work. I'll take care of everything. Even if you get delayed arguing with her, it doesn't matter, just tell her on no uncertain terms, that 'she' should never come here again. Tell 'her' you'll then call your husband to deal with her. That'll surely frighten her, you just see."

Revati plucked some bel leaves and put them inside her basket. She gathered some roses. Then she reached the parijata tree. Like drops of creamy milk on the green grass, the pure white flowers had rained down on the ground. In sharp contrast to the white was the bright coral redness of the stalks shining between the white petals. And in the centre of each little flower was a perfect little coral dot, like someone had painted it there meticulously. What a lovely colour combination! The flowers so silky soft, extremely delicate. Even as you picked them up to string them up as garlands, they would wilt with the heat of the hands. Flowers so fragile that they half withered with the warmth of the human breath on them. Revati bent down, slowly picking up the dainty flowers one by one to put them in her basket. It was a tall tree, standing slightly curved. Beneath the tree, was a neat circle like it had been drawn with the help of a pair of compasses, and within the circle, a white spread of flowers had showered down from the tree. The collective fragrance of the flowers rose and reached the nostrils. Revati gripped the trunk of the tree and shook it vigorously. There was a soft rain of flowers. It was profuse. Revati bent down to pick up the flowers from one half of the circle. She raised her head. The other half of the circle was still full of the fresh flowers. Like drops of creamy milk. An ivory spread. Albescent. A pure, unsoiled whiteness.

Revati stood, waiting indefinitely. She looked around sharpening her eyes to peer into the misty morning. She stood looking in the direction of the road. At some distance, she could see the silvery ripple of the river Gomati. The mist slowly swirled and spread over the road, a thin film of white draping it. The whiteness moved like a cloud. It floated down, the cloudy white garment. Floating like some spirit, the figure in the white saree came near the house. Revati's face brightened. She smiled at the woman. When the woman smiled back at Revati, her entire face was transformed. It was lit up by a soft radiance. Even as Revati looked, surprised at the change, a faint blush spread over the woman's face and she lowered her head.

Ah! It's like the coral stem of the parijata, this blush on her face. With the white saree draped over her head. The whiteness shrouding her young face.

"I've been waiting for you," said Revati.

"Ma...?" she asked, her face unfolding in a pleasant surprise.

"Yes," said Revati. "See this half circle of flowers? All the flowers spread over this half circle are yours, O.K? A fair share! I've taken the flowers from the other half circle," laughed Revati.

Suddenly, the woman's eyes filled. The flush on her face deepened as she stood looking at Revati, her eyes moist.

"Ma..." she said, "Ma... God bless you, your child, your mother-in-law, father-in-law, everybody..."

"God bless you too," said Revati. "You'll be fine, for you pray to Lord Krishna. Oh, and what's your name?"

"Champa."

"Take the flowers, come on. Does your son go to school regularly? Let me go in now, alright? I've a lot of work to do," said Revati, picking up her basket. She crossed the garden and went into the house. As soon as Rajam saw her, she asked: "Did you tell her?"

"Yes mother."

"Hmm. Let me see how she'll have the nerve to come here again. Everyday, she takes up our time. Poor girl, how troublesome for you, seeing her face as soon as you wake up in the morning. Come Revati, have some coffee. Let's attend to our work. If she dares disturb us again I'll ask Raghu to deal with her next time, don't worry," said Rajam, hoping that it may perk up Revati.

Raghunathan got no chance to exert himself on this score. Things happened the following week which literally swept them up and stormed through their lives. The river Gomati was in spate, swelling up every hour to change their lives in one of the worst floods in the history of Lucknow. Gomati Sadan, the neighbourhood which always looked serene with the placid waters of Gomati flowing nearby was now altered into a scene of chaos. Being close to the river, it was one of the worst affected areas. The days of the week stood still in a state of shock as the fury of the floods lashed about them, unabated.

What a change. Overnight! The bank of the river Gomati had always been favourite haunt for jogging, strolling, picnicking, boating or just relaxing. The waters were friendly, tranquil and never failed to attract the people of Lucknow. When Raghunathan was allotted a house near the river in Gomati Sadan, his family was particularly pleased. Little Nitya loved to hop and play around the river bank and the family often enjoyed going boating down the river. But now the waters looked so different! Lashing about in a turbulent fury. And the sky above? It looked as if the elements connived with the waters the way dark clouds gathered above threateningly with an outbreak of a rainstorm the very next day, to make matters worse. Never had a rainfall been so unwelcome as now. The roar of the thunder and the wrath of the furious waters, it was all so ominous. The family huddled together, clinging on to whatever they could lay hands on as a desperate measure, clinging to each other as the last means of stability in the midst of the tempest, raging around them. The Raghunathan family nibbled on the little food they were left with inside their pantry. The family cooked small quantities of rice,

lentil, a few pieces of boiled potatoes and swallowed black coffee unrelieved by even a drop of milk. They used up their stored grocery carefully and spent the days, always half hungry.

Water flowed into the rooms, making its way under the beds, the furniture, the tables and the chairs. The dampness spread a huge blotch on the walls.

'What next?' they waited, an obscure fear tugging at them. The adults pacified the frightened child Nitya unconvincingly, smiling for her, the muscles straining on their faces. They spent the time telling her stories to keep her from crying, and they got an odd feeling that they were telling the stories more for themselves than for the small girl.

Rajam and her husband spent most of their time, fervently praying to all gods in the puja room. Hands folded, eyes closed, their lips moved in prayers for long hours. Around them the gods looked naked, bare of flowers or garlands. But they continued praying.

The days continued to stand still, arrested and enclosed by the waters that were getting stagnant in places. Was this the end of the floods? Is the worst over at last? Can anything be worse than this condition? Perhaps the nightmare is over, the people were saying to each other, although there were still vast sheets of water enveloping the houses, flowing over the roads like small rivulets. People plied on these road-rivers in small boats. They ventured out on small trips of shopping for the essentials, for they had to eat. The rest of the time, they waited patiently, helplessly watching the now murky, dirty waters groaning back, draining off. To all appearances, the residential area of Gomati lay back like a wide stretch of the sea. If anybody wanted to step out of the houses, he had to step into a boat. In some areas, one could manage to wade through the swampy, muddy waters reaching upto the thighs. One could slowly walk with the help of a tall pole or stick for support, taking care not to slip...The alternatives were few.

Everyone was getting very tired of looking at the waters. They were repelled by the load of dirt and filth the water carried now, with all kinds of muck floating on it. They were scared of the epidemic that may break out, in all likelihood. Cholera? Typhoid? Skin infections...? Anything could happen, as natural consequence of contact with this dirty water. The local government of U.P. at last woke up to the problem and sluggishly set about to do some salvage work. Slowly, very slowly, the water drained off the soil, leaving behind a slushy, clammy ground all around.

The people of Lucknow came out on the streets by the hundreds. Trudging on the swampy ground, the soil sticking to their feet and ankles, slipping, tripping, falling, they went about their work, buying

things from shops, running errands, visiting...Raghunathan took a servant with him to buy a whole lot of grocery, vegetables, fruits, bread, butter and all other things. He returned and piled up the things.

"Raghu, how much did you pay for these things? Perhaps you were charged double the rate?" asked his mother, Rajam.

"Precisely!" replied Raghunathan. "Mother, I had to pay double for each one of the items. Shall I tell you how much I spent today, altogether?"

"How much?"

"Never mind. You may faint," he said, laughing.

"Hey Shiva! Why are you testing us all like this? Anyway, we survived. I want to break a coconut and offer it to the gods tomorrow. Raghu, I'd asked you to get me a coconut, did you..."

"Yes mother."

"What did it cost?"

"If I tell you Mother, then you'll cheat your god of his coconut. You may not even break it."

"Hush! Don't talk like that, it's sinful."

Revati cleaned up the puja room. It had been a bare scene for over a week now, with no flowers to adorn the icons or the pictures. And yet, fragrance hung about the room pervasively, a pleasant smell so distinct of the room. It was a blend of flowers, sandalwood, camphor and incense that had stayed back in the room, an invisible presence. Revati worked on the icons and the pictures, dusting, cleaning, scrubbing till they shone with their original lustre. I'll decorate everything with flowers tomorrow, she thought. I'll shower everything with flowers again. Tomorrow.

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The slushy soil not only stuck to her feet and ankles, it also stained the ends of her saree, as Revati noticed it with much annoyance. But Revati was determined to walk ahead and across the garden. She carried her flower basket. Eech! How disgustingly clayey the soil was, sticking to everything. I can pluck the bel leaves from the tree though, but what about parijata which is always strewn on the ground? Ah, all the flowers would be soiled by the slush...she thought, gingerly picking her way to the parijata tree. She could not see any flowers. Perhaps some four or five flowers, as a token to god? Even two would do. Revati looked around on the ground. There was not a single flower to speak of. The ground beneath the tree looked bare and slushy, like the rest of the ground elsewhere. But why? Has the tree suddenly stopped flowering? Revati looked up at the tree. What is *that*? Is *that* the tree? O god! It stood in a shocking state of ruin, the lower part of the trunk slimy and putrid with the branches rotting.

A wreck beyond recognition. A forlorn thing standing in decay. How did this happen? How can a big parijata tree get completely decomposed like this? The dirty pool of stagnant water had surrounded the place for a whole week. Can it wreck such havoc, O god! This exquisite parijata tree, it's gone now, gone! I can't even recognize it, it looks like a naked piece of wood...such a pathetic sight.

Revati did not know what to do. She stood there looking around, blinking her eyes, unable to control the fast beating of her heart. She looked in the direction of the river, very angry. Gomati flowed coolly, molten silver rippling through its way, shining innocently even in the early hour. There was a dense film of mist and fog all around. Revati stared at the distance, noting the misty outline move in the middle. An outline in white merging with the mist. Slowly, the figure made its way down the road. There she is, Champa! Sailing down like a breeze. O yes, that's Champa alright. Only with Champa I can share the grief of the parijata tree, this dear old tree which has come to such a sad end. Only Champa would know the precious value of this tree. She'll understand my grief, my sense of loss. Revati rushed forward to meet Champa.

"Champa!"

"Yes, Ma?"

"Champa, it's ruined, totally ruined." she cried out.

"What? What happened Ma..."

"Look here," said Revati, pointing to the Parijata tree.

Champa turned her head to look at the tree. She became a quivering snake now, a snake writhing in pain after receiving a severe beating. A snake struck by hard blows. Her thin body shivering all over, Champa went pale in the face. Shaken. Then she stood frozen. Stony.

"O Champa, I'm sorry. Your tree has decayed. Your tree, it's gone..."

But Champa was walking away like she was in a trance. She was walking back rapidly as Revati called out behind her, surprised:

"Champa, hey Champa!" The figure clad in white fused with the white of the mist and vanished.

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Revati did not see Champa for a long time. She felt vaguely disturbed. Why didn't Champa come, even once after that? Because the parijata tree had withered away? So what, can't she visit our house to see me? At least once? She had completely stopped coming this side. Revati was nagged by questions buzzing in her mind. She could not talk about this with anyone at home. Instead, she had to ask herself these endless questions and wonder what was the matter. I was so friendly with her, asked her to come everyday and pick

flowers from our garden. After all, the parijata tree belonged to *us*. It is ours. So the loss is *ours*. Now it stands naked like that, a raw stump of wood on which not a single flower will bloom again, ever again... Instead of comforting me, she went away like that, without a word of consolation. And now, she has even stopped coming, so abruptly. I hadn't realized that the woman was so selfish.

She offered herself a hundred rationalizations and yet felt very restless about not having seen Champa. Who can I ask. I can't enquire after her. I don't even know the address of the house in which she works. I can't breathe a word about this to Raghu, he'll only laugh heartily. As for my mother-in-law, god help me! She was always after her blood, calling Champa 'arutthava' so harshly. Poor Champa, where's she? The last time I saw her was the day she stood, speechless with shock, seeing the ruined tree. She was so visibly agitated, like someone had suddenly whipped her across, repeatedly... Where's she? Who can tell me? Who... Perhaps my gardener, may be?

Revati rushed out into the garden. In the half-darkness of dusk, she could spot the gardener in a far-off corner of the garden, raking up the soil in a flower-bed.

"Maali, do you know where this woman lives, Champa? She doesn't come this side at all nowadays. She used to come every morning to pick some parijata flowers, remember?"

"Who do you mean, Maaji? That young widow?"

"Yes, yes, I meant her."

"You don't know?"

"Know what?"

"That she died? O Maaji, she was laid down with high fever, and only for one day. Then she left her little son behind, to sob and weep inconsolably and passed away. Poor kid, he stands all alone in the world."

Stands all alone. Stands all alone. Alone.

Translated from the Tamil by the author

The Last Frontier

Vishwapriya L. Iyengar

"I was born of this unique race
yet knowing my tyrannical love you know
it is not by hatred of other races that I prosecute for mine
All that I would wish is
to answer the universal hunger
the universal thirst
to prescribe at last this unique race free
to produce from its tight intimacies the succulence of fruit..."

Aime Cesaire (Return to my Native Land)

The rains had come and gone leaving an inch thick leathery mould on her mango pickle, she had been a little hasty about the procedure, not paid correct attention to the details of salt and sun. Her hands had twittered like pigeons, her nerves had quite forgotten the excitement of making pickles. There had been no reason to entertain somebody's palette with those wild sensations. Over the years even the skill of bargaining for left-over scraps of fish from passing vendors had lapsed into the general silence of her life.

He had not come entirely unannounced, for many days a ghost band had wandered in these desert gullies where the very old and very poor lived, and played some pale music in her nightmares.

The bits of brown paper torn from packages with poetry written in ornate handwriting were riddles that had caused her to frown while working. The same way that the last of her saris had started fraying, revealing the warp and weft, the genesis of the cloth, these poems made her frown creating a fretwork of creases in her face.

This time after he had crossed the border there had been no couriers from Dacca. That incongruous pictures of dignified sari merchants with those expensive white scented bundles on top of their heads walking into those expensive white scented bundles on top of their heads walking into this filthy part of town ceased after many years. She had begun to enjoy that contraband festivity, she would puff up with pride as the neighbours watched, pretend that somebody

from that side was sending her expensive daccai saris. One even spun long yarns to herself about actually being rich and then, with partition of Bengal, being left bereft. But it was too much effort to spin stories, she might have mustered up a little vivacity and won a little sympathy and attention all around if she had made the effort to colour these tales a little bit, but those poems demanded all her concentration. It was not as if she was very literate, she had read some Mahabharata, Ramayana and an assortment of slokas.

She was a child widow. They had shaved her head and calmed her with words. Periodically, they made her sit in the more quiet corners of the house to read. The domestic budget had been stretched to allocate oil for the lamp so that she could pursue her studies even after it got dark. There had been a consensus of sorts that she required to develop philosophical and spiritual resources. They appreciated her ability to come to terms with disaster, encouraged her walks in the garden after sunset as she muttered slokas in her rich musical voice. The child had to be broken like a colt into widowhood, words would bind her mind against evil. She owed her education, long walks, escape from housework to garden-work, the right to converse with herself, to her widowhood.

But that had been a long time ago, for eventually it was decided that the right thing to do with a widow is nothing. She passed from the house of birth to the house of wedlock like a pillow that gave no one pleasure or pain, adept at keeping herself unobtrusive. Both houses broke up into nuclear families and she served the old people well till they died with no mention of her in their wills. It was inauspicious for the lineage to leave property to a widow. She had made some attempt at choosing her a poor relative. She had realised what a cruel distinction of status her decision had meant.

The air no longer swam across her face with the softness of wet petals, it was cold and slapped her bones sharpening an ache that had begun to sculpt her body. Love had been a knife which had carved her into a landscape of sensuousness, that banned territory which had been fortified all through her adolescence by the mythology of the gods. They had enticed and seduced her, their conniving alliances and betrayals in battles and conquests had not tempered her mind with piety or placidity. She had merely been preoccupied in attempting to put those symbolic constellations into some order. She did not value celibacy having never known sexuality. The parade of the pantheons had not oppressed her, she had been transported to another world of images and parables. She did not lack imagination and dreamt vigorously. Her body glowed in natural communion with oils, water, flowers and she had spoken to the wind and rain in

something akin to poetry. But she never had to transact trust, to open her doors, to shred her silence to comfort another. She had been the exile and always walked on the edge of time.

He came frightened and panting after having crossed the border and told her about smugglers and their gunmen, armed sentries on both sides of the border and asked her for Indian money to buy some liquor to numb his excitement. She had watched him grope in his tension towards something in her which had died a long time ago, perplexed and embarrassed she told him there was no need to have come at such great cost of danger.

She had expected him to think quietly, take the time to answer, she had after all spent some time in making sense of his poetry. If he could remember their childhood days and resurrect their romance through the acid pungence of raw mangoes, he could, she supposed, wait to unclothe words of their meanings. But he had not, he had shouted that she was unworthy of his great love for which he had defied soldiers of two countries. It was as early as the day he arrived that she realised that his bits of brown paper were more valuable to her than his presence. It had none of that charm or romance which exuded from those expensive scented white bundles which heralded the couriers.

In time she was glad for his presence, the midnight recitations, she remembered them as the beat of the rain, his voice would match the intensity of the downpour. He had bought an iktara and would bow the one string instrument with menacing patience. As if time was pelted in thin strips of hide, with cruel precision he executed each note. Perhaps he was at the border admiring the imported watch on the sentry's wrist, clean army boots squashing in the slush. The ghosts of time patrolled the borders. The place where if we could not escape ourselves it is at the cost of a certain sanity.

Prabhadevi felt like clasping his mouth and silencing the cry of fear, yet it was his solitary sense of pain that she most admired, he carried it well. It was as if in loving her he was a great poet of fear, for he was afraid of everything, afraid to go out in daylight because he might be recognised and reported to the police, afraid to go out at night because someone might kill him. He would not explain how he had been able to trace her whereabouts after she had been married and separated from her childhood home. He would look at the scrap of curtain twisted on the window like a priest decoding the symbol of a holy ritual, his clear almond shaped eyes staring emptily at the time, sometimes like a sage sometimes like a secretive child. It was his poems which fell like pellets into her prison-like silence which made her rush towards him with child-like abandon.

The one about the child widow in the bath had been so vivid, the stone bathroom hazy with steam and wood smoke, the child's clean-shaven head shining with oil, a planet in a dark sky. The child exploring her pubescent body that was secretly swelling like a fruit. The earthen basin containing mehndi paste and the child staring at it imaging the patterns that she could paint all over herself, withdrawing from it every time fearing the terrible censure that she would get if she as much as drew even one orange dot on her palms. Painting her hands and then washing it off with boiling water, again and again almost scalding her palms till they turned very red. She could not deny the truth of his feelings. It was strange, he trespassed her most secret and hidden moments through the kaleidoscope of poetry. She treasured so much this intimacy with her lost childhood that she did not notice that this was the first monsoon of her old age. Her limbs seemed to snap everytime she got up after sitting. The urgency of his poetic life, the late nights, her first taste of sexual intercourse and the rigorous work at the many houses soon rubbed out that cheery flush of health and brightness that she had saved through simple austerity. Before it had appeared that she would get old looking like a child. It was in a grey haired wrinkled woman that the face of a passionate woman suddenly appeared and then aged with bitterness and pain.

She had not noticed the monsoon turn to winter. Nor the screaming pain in her bones, she had not noticed that the hunched up position waiting for his words to spin the magic which would enrapture her had transited into a terse tension to devour the relationship. The chill hunger of old age to savour life in an orgy of love, for this was the factor which had eluded her, it was to escape this that a crust of fear and hostility had been burnt into her skin. Her benignity was a prayer mat on which she transformed her frightened timidity into a composure of sorts. She rushed into the stream of human warmth with pores that had closed their scents. Barely had they secreted some exciting and feverish fragrance than they closed to the sand-dune ripples of age.

Whether it was the strain of exhaustion or those wild winds of madness and intimacy that blew through the nights which made his recitations more delirious, she did not know. It was as if the memory of their childhood love had been overlapped with the darkest and most desolate memories. It was too much of an onus of joy to place on a love which had, between childhood and age, no stem of time to keep it upright. She thought of the sugar factory which she had visited with her sister's family. Brown gritty molasses had spun through its dark threads in rotations like punishment to become diamond-crystals of sugar. There was in him acres of molasses to spin through before he could feed her those drops of diamond sugar. He kept striding

through phantom frontiers of pain to catch the patterns of sunlight on the charpai and smile victoriously at her ash-grey face.

Prabhadevi understood poetry with that strenuous concentration reserved for telegrams. It had to be processed before it could give her a feeling of elation, she wandered through dark deserts with him, through caves where beautiful women laughed like dusty echoes. In the end the torch would not fall on the face of a laughing girl swinging from a sal tree. Her toleration of romance had been based on her desire to play heroine. His poems became like telegrams delivered at the wrong address.

That remote look of pain which made his ordinary peasant face glow with a sort of rustic beauty began to cut harsh edges. As the lines of words flowed past without her soul swimming through the tide of his emotions she felt him stiffen. She realised then that it took a mammoth effort on his own part to keep the balm of poetry flowing. She looked at him suddenly and saw the terror of old age locked in his eyes, perhaps it was the fear of the border with gunmen on both sides.

It was then that a sudden and urgent violence erupted in his words, movements and gestures. Before he had only to slant his eyes and shrug his shoulders to ask for a cup of tea, now he stood up like a soldier and ordered. She retreated into a studied opacity, that thick crust of hostility which had been her frontier.

She understood loneliness and the fear of death as clearly as the chains in her throat. Many widows met their death in a cloak of fire, nerves fed with camphor to burn brightly, throats choked with sindoor till silenced in the red dust of wedlock and body numbed with opium till it could not distinguish between the wedding bed and the funeral pyre. Some widows met their death like Satis, burning with the dead bodies of their husbands. Hers was the other way. She had no purpose in being a patron of the arts even to a pathetic refugee lover. She had no use for telegrams which were not addressed to her. Some widows met their death walking on fire, she had met hers on ice.

She thought of nothing but the border and spoke to him about it, exciting his fraying concentration to whip into verse exploring that dangerous strip of time. She knew that he would die in the effort of getting back there, to the moment of panic where he had become his own hangman. But she understood that it was something we have to explore, that moment when we had, through act or negligence, conspired at the murder of something within ourselves. She knew that she too would cross her own border, but she wanted to do it unobserved, his panic would choke her before she even conquered her own anguish. She had learnt to take off her clothes in front of another without

shame, she would in time learn to peel layer after layer, petal after petal, till she felt some kind of peaceful intimacy with herself, it was a place that she had to reach before she died. It was then he had begun playing those slicing notes on the iktara, for hours and hours like a madman's penance, no glib words were catapulted for the frontiers, words came slowly to lead him back to the misty dawn where army boots trampled on the night's harvest of shafeli.

He left one night and she did not attempt to stop him, perhaps he understood that he had not arrived at the land of his dreams. Her cold heart seemed scarcely able to cradle the dying embers of his passion and fear spread like a rash over his soul. One evening she heard him complaining to the watchman that she listened to his poems like a spy, as if she was trying to understand them for somebody else, that she was planning to hand him over to the police as an agent of the other side. Her tired muscles which sagged from her face like pouches of dough hardened to rock, she stared at him with painful disbelief.

In poetry he deferred to the truth, in life he painted reality with shadows. She understood that she would never be able to free him from that prison of fear in which he had learnt to be so secure. He had not been too explicit about the circumstances of his life on the other side, but she had understood that the border had extended a long way into the country from which he had escaped. Though he sang lustily of freedom and sought a child's love from an old woman, he had been drawing lines everyday extending the border till it striped the walls of their hut. She understood war as the violence which stripes even the soles of feet.

She watched the way he looked shiftily from object to object in the room, as though each was a chess pawn in some grand master's game, his eyes resting on each as if to value the extent of his sentimental bondage. As each object was stripped to its kernel and lay vacant in the scales of his eyes, he smiled like a prisoner who realizes that the walls are made of clouds. She wanted to tell him that there was no need for this theatrical measurement of their intimacy, he could leave. For her empty life had at least been cloaked with a certain dignity and she felt compelled to hold the curtain of the widow's white cloth. She taunted him to speak of the border and he fixed his gaze on her, eyes stabbed with pain, and slowly recited verses that were wrenched out of a deep and frightening silenced like a nurse taking the pulse of a patient with her eyes on the clock.

Prabhadevi shut the windows, the planks of crate wood had swollen with the rains and curved inwards, they would rot in the heat and the sun would scald her through the warts in the wood when summer came.

She sat rocking against the cold walls in which the moisture had congealed. Curved like the warped wood of the windows, she moved against the flesh coloured clay walls, feeling her spine as distinctly as a bow.

There was a sharp sensation of fire running in a single thread from her head to her loins, throwing her head back she parted her legs and sat panting. The pearls of sweat above her brows had that nick of memory, cold drops of sandal paste which had decorated her forehead in a chain of fragrance that day when she had been abruptly snatched away from her queendom of dolls to sit in the pandal with a strange man who kept twitching his fingers. This fragrance was different, it did not come from the bark on any tree, it was the fragrance of her own fear and desire that decorated her forehead, clinging to the telegraph-lines of worry and age.

It was as if fear and desire flowed in two opposite currents, yes, she was a river that ran over old grey rocks, turmoil of conflicting motions, desire raising the flow till she felt full of power, fear choking her senseless, the strain was tearing something inside her, something inside her was crumbling, yielding. The way you crumbled rust-brown sand stones which lay by the magnificent spectacle of ancient forts. Crumbling it like a clod of earth in her hands she had felt triumphant, sticking her tongue out at history, as if time was not really so invincible. It was as if in the smoke-glazed blood-sunset of war an entire fort of sandstone had crumbled over her body. The agony twisted on souls in the bloody carnivals that were wars made her nerves pulsate in that emphatic beat of simply being alive and alone. Even her sorrow was languid. It was a loneliness she had never allowed herself to feel that led her to the cream of herself. Her space and time was that carpet of moss which spread past the old grey rocks. Yes she had crossed the border and it was here that fear turned to terror.

It was terror that posted sentries at the new horizon, terror which screamed that this vastness should never shrink, the value of this landscape would pay the sentries with those burning sharp sensations of fright. She was afraid to lose this space and she entrusted it to the will of her heart by hallucinating through oceans of feeling. She too was a fugitive from across the border who sought a lover. The lover she was to herself.

She had held him like the stem of the sails, they had dodged and tossed around their bodies like swimmers who did not want to drown each other. The boat, a capsule of their intimacy, had kept them afloat in its drift, precariously balancing over an ocean it did not mean to comprehend. But when you did not hold anyone and when you were not afraid of drowning in your despair even if it mean growing

blind in the brilliance of your own sensuousness, it was different.

She did not know that her hands were wet, cold pebbles polished fine by flowing water, that they could fly like doves through her arms and nuzzle like sleeping rabbits in her armpits. Her grey hair ran like a silver waterfall in lines of water over her dark brown, bone-moulded shoulders where the secrets of many metals were hidden. Her breasts shone like purple swollen bulbs of onions and baby lambs ran over her suckling milk. She could feel moss growing like doe-hide inside her thighs, the baby lambs brushed her skin with soft fur. Tall strips of sun-green grass bent with a gentle breeze to caress her eyelids.

Soon the night's wind began to choreograph her movements, she moved east with the howling bellow, blowing through the coast twisted trees, slapping the sea with foamy tides. Blowing west over deserts burnt gold in the fires of sunset. She moved like a dancer to the winds of desire and the winds of fear.

Stretching wide through horizons, leaving the frontiers with fear, chasing the space which her soul could unfurl in the minute tapestry of intricate embroidered sensations. Further and further into her wilderness. It was a vast space, a paradise of exotic blossoms that grew out of the earth of her own body. Every word heard and thought perceived was remembered that night and as she spoke to herself of these memories it would uncoil in a sensation. It was as if she was in a country whose language she had understood but never spoken. She had crossed the last frontier. She threw her head back and laughed, it was the birth of a child in an old woman's face.

Her nose was shining in a filigree of sweat, but not as much as her pale watery moon-like eyes.

She opened the windows slowly feeling the thickness of the warped wood, pressing it till she felt drops of water imprint her palms. She had never felt this cave of earth within herself, the spiral of spring which was her secret.

She opened the window and looked at the winter sky filled with stars. The coldness slapped her face but she did not turn away, her cheeks kept plump and she sucked in the wind as if it were a hookah.

She began to count the stars to fix upon a quilt which she would spread upon the sleeping world. She would never have to cross another frontier of fear, for there would be no more borders.

Book Reviews

R. W. Ferrier: *The Arts of Persia*; Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd., Ahmedabad; 1990; illustrated with glossary, maps and index; Price not stated.

The Arts of Persia edited by R. W. Ferrier certainly does justice to the richness of the Persian tradition and the extraordinary contribution made towards the enrichment of life, of the artistic expression and development of aesthetics of the people of Central Asia which in turn has had an important influence on its neighbouring countries.

The early 70s had seen a spate of books on Iran; lately they have been few and far between. The present volume covers a range of subjects from pre-historic art, to the art of the Achamenians, Parthians, Sasanians, upto Vernacular Architecture, carpets, textiles, laquer, and calligraphy. Twenty well-known experts in different fields have contributed to the volume and the illustrations have been selected with discernment and perception covering a vast area. It is for the first time that in a single volume such a range of subjects has been covered, which is now accessible to art lovers, students and researchers on art history.

The only other study of this kind is the monumental survey of Persian Art edited by A.U. Pope and Phyllis Ackerman which ran into twelve volumes in the first edition and was started in 1926 when Pope visited Iran for the first time. The first volumes came out before World War II. Pope had gathered renowned scholars from all over the world to contribute to this survey. Until the 60s when the survey of Persian Art was reissued it was taken to be the definitive work on Persian art and no attempt was made to update the material. Since then archaeological evidence, studies by cultural anthropologists and art historians have thrown up a body of knowledge, which has led to a great deal of rethinking in a number of areas of research.

The current volume is dense with information and tries to bring together a great deal of recent material in its contents. The editor in his Foreword to the volume says that though there have been innumerable studies which have contributed towards an understanding of the historical and aesthetic aspects of Persian art, yet the modern mind has been "imprecise in the interpretation of the Persian past". We should not only consider the

achievements of Persian art in the light of royal patronage but also in terms of the contribution made by the people and the skills of the craftsman, as well as the spirit that moved them to greater heights of perfection in their art forms. The chapter on Architecture by Hillenbrand is one of the best; it keeps this approach in mind.

Hillenbrand emphasizes the use of brick work which is one of the most important Persian contributions to architecture. Persian architecture from its early beginning had a deep awareness of its environment and of the available material which was mud and later bricks. Both these materials have been used with mastery and sensitivity. The sensuous structural mud domes are a part of the Iranian landscape as well as the austere brick towers. Bricks were used at different levels to create a tension in its structure and an austere exterior decoration, which effectively combined the play of light and shadow to create monumental forms. The combination of sensitivity to materials, to structural forms and to the environment is a true expression of the Persian spirit. Hillenbrand keeps this spirit in the forefront of his writing and in the choice of illustrations. He is not carried away by the rich tile work of the Saffavid period which is often the case with a number of writers.

There is a dynamic tension in the early structures which can be seen right upto the Qajar period,

as is indicated by the writer in his choice of illustrations. The photograph of Masjidi-Aqa-Bazurg of Kashan shows beautiful brick work combined with the use of tiles. Even of the Saffavid period he illustrates the austere facade of Ali Qupu rather than the floral dados of Lutfullah mosque or the *Madraseh Madar-i-Shah*.

The article on Vernacular buildings does not do justice to the subject, though it does describe the pigeon towers *Yagchal*, ice houses, Ab-ambars water reservoirs and the *badgir*, the wind catchers, about which not much has been known except amongst specialists of the area and recently by researchers on appropriate technology.

The article by Jenny Housego on carpets covers the range of historical carpets of Iran and goes on to cover tribal carpets which gives a great deal of new information researched by her. This sheds light on some of the earlier carpets, the origins of which had not been known.

The chapter on textiles is not of the same quality. It appears to have put together a good deal of researched work but fails to talk of important traditions, such as the *termeh* of Kirman, Yazd and Meshed as well as the ikats of the area. The tribal weavers are mentioned only in passing and the range of their techniques, styles and motifs is not even touched upon. The expertise of the Iranian dyers about which treatises have

been written and which influenced India as well as Syria is not mentioned. There is a certain unevenness in the treatment of chapters which is bound to happen when such a vast area is covered.

The chapter on Persian Painting also does not do justice to the subject. The selection of illustrations could also have been better and the reproduction quality of the murals is very poor.

The arrangement of chapters appears to be very arbitrary. It would perhaps have been much better if title work could have followed the articles on Architecture. Calligraphy could have followed next as it plays an important part in the decoration of the buildings. The art of Book Binding was highly developed in Iran and even until recently book binders worked in the local bazars, binding books at the request of discerning patrons. Book binding and the patterns used for decoration, influenced stylistically the carpet designs and other associated art forms. The richness of this tradition does not come through in the text of the chapter.

The book covers such a wide range of subjects, on which so much research has been done and continues to be done; and that too with such an excellent range of illustrations, that it is but natural that all aspects of the subject cannot be fully covered. The volume however fulfills its objective of paying a tribute to the

permanence of the Persian spirit and its people, who have contributed so greatly to the enrichment of the artistic expression of mankind.

Jasleen Dhamija

French Memsahib by Taya Zinkin, Thomas Harmsworth Publishing, Stoke Abbott, £12.95, Pp. 204, 1989

French Memsahib is Taya Zinkin's twenty-first book, and an utterly charming one at that. It is unputdownable and often scintillating, and yet it fails on one very important front—the writer somewhere along the line fails to go beyond the surface, and the failure leaves one comparing it with James Cameron's vivid *An Indian Summer*. The Cameron book was a deeply felt book, far more in-depth and analytical of what Cameron saw and felt. Taya Zinkin unfortunately fails to grip the reader in the same way. And yet, this is a charming book telling a story of the author's affair with India. *French Memsahib* is lively and uneffected, warm and sympathetic.

Miss Zinkin in the second sentence of the book writes, "I thought India was French" and from that moment on unveils the mysterious-to-her-India. She knew Kipling's *Jungle Book* by heart when she was a mere ten-

year old. An Indian girl studied in her school and mystified her. "I gave India no thought until I saw a film with Tyrone (sic) Power cast as a handsome Indian doctor..." She next came across dancer Ram Gopal and his troupe. India remained vastly unknown to her for a long time and she got a better idea from letters from Maurice Zinkin, ICS, to whom she got engaged, disengaged, and ultimately married.

About the ICS, Maurice wrote her, "The ICS is the Indian Civil Service, the Service to which I have the honour to belong. The Service is restricted to roughly a thousand, half English, half Indian. Most of the top jobs of India's administration are reserved for us. At the moment, of course, we are appallingly short. The war has stopped recruitment so that we are 10% under strength, and there are about twice as many jobs to do as before. So we have had to promote Provincial Service people and bring in outsiders on a large scale, not always with happy results. There is a perpetual argument between the Centre and the Provinces, and between Departments, over who is to have which ICS officer. It tends to mean that we get the hardest jobs or the ones in which the biggest mess has been made and then get moved on to the next mess.

"That is of course the ICS view of ourselves. Others might tell you that we are rigid bureaucrats without imagination or sympathy,

bent only on exploitation and holding up all development by our red tape. You will have to decide what is the truth for yourself."

Elsewhere he writes her: "The truth is that we are horribly sex-starved. With the huge number of troops now in India, and the ban on the entry of European women that has been going on for three years, there are about a hundred men for every unmarried girl and a very high proportion of those unmarried girls are either spoilt or dumb. You have to work for a woman here, and after a long day in the office you don't have an awful lot of chance in open competition with the Cavalry on leave. So we just sublimate and hope that when we do one day get leave, we won't be too dazzled by going back to a society in which there are more women than men. Heavenly thought! "They got disengaged. Maurice got engaged to a Bombay beauty and Taya to a budding diplomat. Their respective engagements broke up and he proposed.

The book is full of her adventures with her beloved Maurice and her efforts to settle down in a strange and unfamiliar people. There are meetings with various friends, their wives, and many others. She tells her adventures half-amused and knows that she must have been laughing sometimes, crying sometimes, when she went through them as a foreigner would. She travels too, quite happily mostly.

On her honeymoon she "plied him with questions about himself, his friends, life in India. I waited after a particularly satisfactory cuddle to ask about his fiancée."! How charmingly that is put. He tells her, and further on says that he took her for a film at Regal. "After the film, as I was saying goodbye, she asked me why I had not kissed her. I had not kissed her. It was very embarrassing, so I kissed her. Having kissed her, naturally I proposed."

'Because you kissed her!'

'I enjoyed kissing her. But you need not be jealous'! Once again, an anecdote has been humorously told.

Taya Zinkin faced all sorts of problems, met all sorts but went along the dusty and at times crisis-ridden government official's life as bravely as she could.

The book abounds with well written passages, vivid at times. Lady Rama Rau is described thus: "Exceedingly handsome, tall, statuesque, superb body, suggested rather than revealed, she looked like Juno. Ancient goddess, she was draped in dark red silk with a wide gold brocade border flowing behind her back, firmly anchored to her shoulder by a large discus of chiselled rubies."

A Railway station is vividly described: "An architectural solecism, its baroquely ornate gothic facade clashing with its tropical surroundings, the station was everything Kipling's Kim led

me to expect. The crowds. The smells. The din. The bustle. It was as if all India, but for its cattle, had congregated under cathedral-shaped glass canopy. Infants, children, women, beggars, pie-dogs, cooking pots, earthen-jars, brass buckets, bedding-rolls, bundles. Red turbanned porters with huge brass number-plates gleaming against red cotton shirts, balanced heavy loads on their heads, carrying extra loads under their arms, tight-rope acrobats slicing forward through dense crowds. Travellers, sleepers, and vendors packed the platforms."

India amazed her, baffled her, bewildered her, and yet she loved it all. India was a grand passion, a grand affair, and this book celebrates it. It is not her first book, and hopefully it will not be her last.

The authoress is amusing, more so when she writes about Sarojini Naidu: "Ample supplies of goodies kept converging at Sarojini's court. Saris, shawls, fruit by the basketful. In fairness, her visitors were most welcome to the perishable tokens of her popularity. One day, when I complained that life in India was expensive and that we were finding it difficult to make ends meet, she gave me a stern lecture. The British, she said, were jolly lucky to be in India where they led a life of luxury at the people's expense. It came ill from a Civil Servant's wife to complain, specially since life in India was

dirt cheap."

Taya Zinkin gave a spirited reply: "Dirt cheap for you perhaps, not for me. How much did you pay for those mangoes? And that sari? And those pretty slippers embroidered with seed pearls? And the food, not to mention all the doctors say you should not eat? Do you pay for the stamps when you write a letter?"

'All right, my dear! You win. I was naughty!' The anecdote leaves one in fits of laughter.

'Freedom's Holocaust' is the final chapter of the book and the trauma of the bloodbath and its aftermath comes alive, but not as feelingly as the occasion demanded. There is a cooling of tempers and soon thereafter the Zinkins leave India. The book ends. There is an Index at the end it is incomplete. Many names are missing. The book has dozens of spelling mistakes apart from other errors. Jinnah's first name is misspelled as is Kota House (as Kotah House). Sardar Patel is referred to as Deputy Prime Minister, though he was never that. Churchill is stated to have called Gandhi 'a naked Fakir' while in fact he called him 'a half naked Fakir'. 'Insha Allah' comes off as 'Inch Allah'!

When more and more readers go through this book, they will call it a movable feast, an expensive one at that. The book is too expensive. Perhaps it will appear in paperback at an affordable price.

Atul Mital

Modern Civilisation: A crisis of fragmentation: S.C. Malik; Abhinav Publications, New Delhi 1989, pp. 188+xi Rs. 150.

Soon after I had finished reading S.C. Malik's remarkable book which relates insights of ancient seers with modern scientific studies on understanding the deeper layers of the human mind, I came across Stephen Hawking's book on astrophysics 'A brief history of time from the Big Bang to Black Holes'. Curiously, even though the two books cover very different areas of investigation, they meet at their end-points, as in fact do the higher reaches of quantum physics with eastern philosophies.

Stephen Hawking currently holds Newton's chair as Lucasian professor of mathematics at Cambridge University, and is regarded as the most brilliant theoretical physicist since Einstein. His book explores the outer boundaries of astrophysics and the nature of time and the universe, and then leads on to the biggest scientific quest of all which Einstein had worked on during the last thirty years of his life; the search for a unified theory that combines General Theory of relativity and quantum mechanics.

Steering through a universe of galaxies, black holes, white dwarfs, quarks, anti-particles and gavitrons, in a lucid non-mathematical language, Hawking

tells us about the work of the brightest minds of modern science with scores of Nobel prizes won on the way to finding an answer to the ultimate riddle: Where did the universe come from? How and why did it begin? Is there a God who started time and matter with the Big Bang? But then, Hawking also tells us that a scientific theory is just a mathematical model we make to describe our observation; it exists only in our minds.

Malik's book is about the mind. It talks about consciousness which is now looming large at the frontiers of quantum physics as the ultimate reality of all creation and the universe. Malik does not trace the chronological history of studies in understanding the nature of the human mind. It is not, according to him, a steady linear progression like the great march of science in the last three hundred years. The ultimate understanding of one's own mind, of all life and the universe, is arrived at by an individual on his own. Malik says that the accumulated wisdom of human civilization, the teachings of great seers, all epics and philosophies, can only indicate a general direction. Progress in the final path is made alone, unsupported in space and time by any 'guru' or 'granth'. This is undoubtedly worth pondering over. Jesus was a young man who found illumination without any elaborate study of the scriptures.

The story of Buddha is similar. What then was the source of power of these teachers which holds sway over the minds of millions of men centuries after their death?

An anthropologist by training, Malik has a multi-disciplinary approach. He points to the very real dangers of over specialization and the limitations it imposes on the vast potentialities of the human brain. He traces the origin of modern science and technology in the specific historical-philosophical climate of western Europe and the mechanical (survival) model of thought it created, which has outlived its utility: Malik points to the necessity of breaking out of this mechanical thought model if man is to survive as an integrated harmonious being in touch with the sources of his existential, experiential dimensions.

Explaining the complexity of modern science, Hawking writes—"You have to be a specialist, and even then, you can only hope to have a proper grasp of a small proportion of the scientific theories. Only a few people can keep up with the rapidly advancing frontiers of knowledge, and they have to devote their whole time to it and specialize in a small area." He goes on to say: "We know the basic laws that underline all of the chemistry and biology. Yet we have certainly not reduced these subjects to the status of

solved problems; we have, as yet, had little success in predicting human behaviour from mathematical equations!"

At the beginning of this century, scientists thought that everything could be explained in terms of properties of continuous matter, such as elasticity and heat conduction. The discovery of atomic structure and the uncertainty principle changed all that. In 1928, a physicist and Nobel Prize winner, Max Born had said that theoretical physics will be over in six months. His confidence stemmed from Dirac's discovery of the equation that governed the electron. It was then thought that a similar equation would govern the proton which was the only other particle known at that time. However, the discovery of the neutron and nuclear forces gave a new direction to physics. Notwithstanding such developments in the history of physics, Hawking confidently writes "... I still believe there are grounds for conscious optimism that we may now be near the end of the search for the ultimate laws of nature."

Relating this 'end of the road' statement to Hawking's observation that scientists have as yet had little success in predicting human behaviour, it does seem that for understanding the mind consciousness, the ultimate reality), the path leading through science stands blocked by what Malik calls the mechanical

(survival) model of thought, notwithstanding fascinating new developments in biology, genetics and the DNA structure which Malik lucidly explains in his book. Giving details of plant psychologists Rupert Sheldrake's work (1980) on morphogenetic field (blueprint for form and behaviour) and morphic resonance, Malik says that these ideas have far reaching implications for our understanding of nature and consciousness. He talks of the aura, psychic vibrations (electron field ?), that surround each one of us and continuously changes its form as the thoughts and feelings of persons keep changing, and that when two people interact and are physically near, there is a natural response of affinity or repulsion depending on the nature of this electron aura.

Emotions, feelings and spirit, even as they can now be catalogued in terms of electric charges and chemicals injected into the blood stream, are in the realm of consciousness which is the theme of Malik's book. Science has failed so far to relate universe to man and his spirit which is the ultimate investigator of all phenomenon. What is this spirit? Where does it come from? Is it the ultimate source of all? It is beginning to appear even in the higher reaches of science that the investigator is the investigated.

Supporting his arguments

with the observation of philosophers and seers of all traditions, from Delphic to vedic, on the one hand and with the latest developments in psychology, biology and related sciences on the other, Malik points to the necessity of a synthesis of the inner and the outer, the observer and the observed. He pleads for a harmonious blending to remove the duality which arises from the purely analytical and external approach of science in its observations. Hawking mentions the anthropic principle in his book: We see the universe the way it is because we exist. This is not far from the view presented by Malik that the universe is you and you are the universe. It does appear from the encyclopaedic observations of up-to-date researches made in various fields, noted by Malik, that modern science itself is heading for this conclusion.

Modern civilisation: A crisis of fragmentation, is a fascinating book. It should be read with great profit by our scientific-technocratic-managerial elite who by their education, training, and work environment are apt to regard any discussion on subjects like consciousness as religious mumbo-jumbo that has no relationship to the actual work of the world in which they have to make their mark. Using the tools of science, Malik highlights the fallacy and dangers of such attitudes.

Sharat Kumar

Modern Indian Poetry in English by Bruce King; Oxford University Press; Rs 150.

A distinguished scholar of Commonwealth Literature, Bruce King is known for his work *The New English Literatures: Cultural Nationalism in a Changing World* as also for his edited works *Introduction to Nigerian Literature*, *West Indian Literature*, *A Celebration of Black and African Writing* and *Literatures of the World in English*. His *Modern Indian Poetry in English* is the first major history of Indian English poetry in that it records important poets, poetry books and journals as well as publishing houses and events. It amply shows that the concept of Commonwealth in the field of literature, means much more than the historical fact of existence of the Association of Great Britain with her dependencies and self-governing nations: it means the common wealth (the unhyphenated *common wealth*, or the common riches) of literature produced in English, not necessarily Queen's English, but English which is secular and has no 'caste'. At one time, Raja Rao rightly observed, "Pandit Nehru is Sri Nehru, Maulana Azad is Sri Azad. Thus Mr Frank Anthony, the Anglo-Indian leader, is Sri Anthony. Likewise, since India is secular, the English language loses its caste and becomes the language of India."

The English language in India may not have any caste. But is it as authentic a vehicle of thoughts and emotions as expressed by the Indian people in their native languages? Or, is the poetry written in Indian regional languages more *natural* than the one done in the non-native Indian English? English in India may be the lingua communi, but can it be the language of communicating the inner-most subtleties? Indian English poetry at its best, uses local, often exotic and obscure Indian words printed in italics with footnotes explaining them for want of equivalents in all kinds of English-English dictionaries. Thus, the earlier pre-independence nationalist and revivalist poetry in Indian English, which the author condemns, becomes in no substantial way different from the present post-independence poetry in it, which he praises. The reason is that the latter, too, uses Indian history, legends and mythology. For instance, Jayant Mahapatra's *Relationship* celebrates "the oldest Aryan Hindu belief": This is the real body: raging pachyderm/ with the crazy testicles, red and wild,/the lusting god of the blackest Siva night;/...For now I touch your secret order/embarassed *yoni*;/before me lie the sulking years of dreams,/the stricken purposes of the muscles, the violent splashes of sunsets/in the fibres of the being."

Bruce King constructs a solid

edifice on the basis of formidable data, but *de-constructs* it himself with cracks in his formulations. He makes "alienation" a precondition for all modern poetry and looks at Indian English poetry in the western poetic ethos, saying "As poetry in our time is not part of mass or popular culture, to be a poet (in contrast to a song writer) is to be alienated regardless of what language is used or where one lives." Interestingly, it is the Indian English poets in our country who feel alienated, and not the poets in Indian regional languages who mirror joys and sorrows, hopes and despairs of the Indian masses. The kind of alienation the Indian English poets feel is generated by reading the alien stuff of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound and also by being unable to make their surroundings transparent in the non-native English language. Unlike the British-English, American-English and Australian-English poets, the Indian-English poets are bilingual, very often trilingual. All told, King's *Modern Indian Poetry in English* will remain a useful study on the subject for many years to come.

Motilal Jotwani

Bird Poems by Man Mohan Singh; Seagull Books; Calcutta; Rs 80.

A member of the Indian Administrative Service, Man

Mohan Singh is a distinguished poet with two collections of poetry—*Village Poems* and *Bird Poems*—to his credit. The second collection under review here etches out both the common and rare Indian birds in their varied moods and attitudes, actions and activities. Their courting, mating, nesting, preying, and dying—often at man's hands—is portrayed in sequences of poems. The dance sequence in the poems on pp. 32, 41 and 60 celebrates exquisite courtship and nuptial displays: "Their alphabet of love/borrows its letters/from the shooting stars./With the bow of the beak/the expanse of the wings/and breeze rustling through feathery down/a love song is composed and sung. Beaks meet in the air/as leaves 'strike a melody./The tips of wings touch the blue sky/like charging clouds in an electric symphony." (The Language of Dance)

In the poems on pp. 34 and 57 relating to the death are depicted a pair of Sarus and the Siberian cranes of Bharatpur. While the former delineates the widowed male crane pining and ultimately dying for his female, the latter generalizes the death of the Siberian cranes, an endangered species. In the poignant poem "A Pair of Sarus Cranes", the poet says, "He returned after the killers were gone/to the death scene/inscribed on the blood-soaked grass./With his beak he kissed/a few feathers/and picked

the ones/the winds had not blown away./A wave of the sea/that he had never seen/came to him from far away/and carried him to her/with a shrug of eternity."

It seems, Man Mohan Singh has observed birds and their life for a long time and loved them devotedly, all his life. Hence, his imagery is personally felt and evocative. Two features of the book that deserve mention are the delicate sketches of birds, by Jane Stenhouse; and the short paraphrasing comments in the right-hand corners atop the poems, by the poet himself. For instance, opposite the sketch of the golden oriole by Jane Stenhouse on p. 15, the poem entitled "Golden Song" is given: "The summer scene mutes the song/of spring's courtships and fertility dances./The oriole appears on the scene like a figurine in gold/emerging from the prison of a mould./The heat of the summer/flows in wavy lines over sand dunes./The bird whistles in cheer/like a child humming in tune/composed by the breeze/for spinning honeybees./The song of the bird/defies the spears of the sun's rage/with a melody celebrating/the advancing beaded strings of rain." And atop this poem, in the right-hand corner, the poet says with a view to providing a reader's guide for fuller appreciation, "An ornithologist said of the golden oriole that 'no emperor had ever been robed as regally as the golden

oriole'. With his golden plumage and black band across the eye, he sings through the summer's hot days."

That is why the celebrated English poet Stephen Spender said about the *Bird Poems*, "These poems both charm the reader and increase his store of ornithological knowledge."

As in this poem in which two similes—'like a figurine in gold' and 'like a child humming a tune'—are deployed, the whole book abounds in similes, vivid and at times startling, and presents a world of similitude in feathers and wings.

Motilal Jotwani

Masks and Faces by B. K. Karanjia, Vikas Publishing House, pp. 123, 1989, Rs 125.

Unfortunately, the present reviewer's knowledge of contemporary Indian fiction in English is so limited that it is rather hard to place this collection of stories within the context of what is sometimes called "Indo-Anglian" creative writing. However, the facts about the book speak for themselves—the short stories contained in the volume have been published in such commercial publications as *Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Femina* and *Debonair*. The collection itself has been published by an estab-

lished and prestigious publishing house. We are dealing here with a writer who is neither a neophyte nor an amateur. The stories cover two decades or more, from 1957 to 1979.

In making any sort of a value-judgment on the book the first difficulty is deciding whether to take it as representative of commercial or professional short story writing in English in India or whether it should be evaluated as an individual case.

The second issue which the critic cannot avoid is the question whether creative writing in English in India must be deliberately "Indian", carry an Indian flavour, introduce the odd Indian word here and there, for example Karanjia uses the word "kanjoosh" when there are so many words for "miserliness" in English. In this instance and in many others the use of Hindi words and in one story, a complete Hindi sentence, serve no function whatsoever. As a general issue, anyone acquainted with literature would unhesitatingly concede that Joyce's Dublin, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha county or Thomas Hardy's Dorset are inextricably bound up with the universal themes of which they write. Perhaps I confess only a personal misfortune but in almost all "Indo-Anglian" writing I have read and also in V.S. Naipaul's books, the Indianness has seemed at best a mediocre kind of "local colour"

which serves no clear purpose and at worst, a cynical pandering to publisher's demands and popular tastes while in the case of V.S. Naipaul and R.K. Narayan the Indianness seems a tailor-made concession to a kind of literary tourism among the reading public abroad. Karanjia's stories clearly belong to the second category.

Of the fifteen stories, ten deal with the very prosperous and self-contained Parsee community of Bombay. Granted that Karanjia is no Faulkner or Hardy, that he has no intention of dealing with either the tragedy or absurdity of the human condition, the stories about Parsees tell us little or almost nothing that is new about the community; it is common knowledge that their tower of silence attends the corpse. It is also no surprise that the Parsee community has its own newspaper dealing with Parsee news and gossip. In the story *An Awkward Thing* the heroine says to the hero—"There are so many funny things about our community—so many sad things too—that need to be told as you are telling them...." This is the promise and perhaps the intention behind the stories about the Parsee community but the promise does not seem to be kept. The Parsee stories, as indeed all the stories in this book, depend on a type of trick ending; the reader is supposed to be surprised by the turn of

events, while, in fact only the most puerile kind of reader would be surprised by the type of situational dénouement Karanjia employs. Consider the plot of *The Cost of Dying*. A man, a Parsee, has died penniless, not even leaving behind sufficient to pay the expenses of a Parsee funeral. The narrator who is something of a good samaritan and a close friend of the deceased can do nothing but share the grief of the man's widow. Then he approaches the dead man's employer for the funds required for the funeral. The narrator next goes to see the mistress of the deceased and tells her how things stand. Finally, he is present at the funeral, expecting a pauper's funeral but is quite surprised when all the rituals are observed and everything paid for. Who could have been the benefactor? The story hinges on the surprise that it is Soona, the dead man's mistress, "a fallen woman" an outcaste in the Parsee community who has helped when all the respectable members of the community have turned their backs on a man who is stupid enough to die a pauper. The Parsee stories and almost all the stories in the collection, depend rather heavily on coincidence and twists of fate. In a short story, this characteristic is not necessarily a drawback, though when the impact of Joyce's *Dubliners* or Katherine Mansfield's short stories began to be

felt, the trick-ending short story was abandoned by serious short story writers. Though perhaps one should not dismiss a book for being old-fashioned, this collection of stories does not have two other traits which take away the pleasure of reading—firstly, Parsee words are frequently used and the text does not give much of a clue as to what they mean and in the second place, not much care is given to the use of English language itself as if the stories or narrative were the end in view and the language only a means employed in telling some extraordinary story. Far from being extraordinary, the stories are humdrum and dull even when they concern “glamorous” people, stars and scriptwriters of the Bombay cinema world. We have to endure clichéd sentences such as—“I folded the warm bird of her hand in mine and laid it gently, to rest in her lap, before switching on the ignition—and switching off my last chance”, etc. etc.

Though it would be unfair to accuse the author of these stories as having any pretensions to “high art” or great literature of lasting value and even though it is unequivocally clear that he has written the stories to amuse and entertain, yet in the case of at least one story it is impossible to avoid the question whether the author has any moral responsibilities at all if he justified in

glamorising the worst aspects of the society with which he is familiar and misuse his position as a kind of teacher to either silently acquiesce to or cynically promote certain values which are accepted but are quite clearly wrong. This is not to take an extreme Tolstoyean view where art which is not didactic and moral is to be thrown on the scrap-heap as bad and immoral. The modest claim being made is that the artist does have a certain didactic function and responsibility and to shirk that responsibility or to write as if no such responsibility ever existed, does not merit much respect.

The short story in question is *The Chance*. The gist of the story is that an aging Bombay movie scriptwriter falls in love with a visiting Filipino woman who is, he admits, young enough to be his daughter. She is married with two children but separated from her husband. This extra-marital affair (on both sides) continues for some time until the hero/narrator says to himself that it is high time to legalize the affair. The quaint phrase which he uses to express his reason for proposing to her is—“I wanted to make an honest woman of her”. She refuses his hand, on the ground that her family in the Philippines will not accept a re-marriage on her part. This kind of situation happens if not every day but quite frequently in big cities and among the wealthy and

"glamorous". It is not expected of the author to make a righteous sermon against adultery from the pulpit. But one cannot help wondering whether it is naivety or cynicism which drives the author to write with such relish and without a trace of irony about a love affair where there is no love or human feeling, only certain glamorous purchasable commodities—"I began (my courtship) with gifts. I could afford them because I was under contract for writing of the screenplays of three multi-starrers and the "black" advance for all three had been paid to me". What are we to make of such a hero who has never even put up a struggle against the conventions of society and reveals just how dishonest he is himself in saying—"I wanted to make an honest woman of her. She wanted me to be less than honest with myself. I thought bitterly—we are strong but convention is stronger. Those who lay down the rules are the world's rulers".

It is up to the individual reader to make his own judgment on these stories and if possible determine their place within the context of English fiction written in India. To the present reviewer, the stories seem flawed by a shabby, cliched style and humdrum, mechanical, forgettable plots. Worse still, if these stories are to serve as models for neophyte writers who are seeking publication in commercial

magazines, then the prospect looks very gloomy indeed.

Amitava Ray

Delhi—A Novel by Khushwant Singh, Viking, 1989, pp. 391 Rs 150.

There are few cities in the world as historied as Delhi and even fewer that have attracted the novelist who re-fashions history through a hundred different voices that punctuate the long saga in human and individual terms. Khushwant Singh's Delhi—A Novel attempts to do this and, like it or not, does it with some success. It is novel without a hero, though it has a protagonist-narrator who is author himself, who holds the periods and historical episodes together. If we must pin-point a classical hero, it is the city of Delhi with its succession of conquerors for when the captains and kings have departed, Delhi continues to stand, an ancient sacrifice, still recognisably itself through the transformations that history has forced upon it.

Clearly there are problems for anyone who attempts to make a novel, and a historical novel, of Delhi through the ages, because the chronicle is so long and so varied that continuity is constantly challenged. Khushwant Singh overcomes this difficulty by

interspacing the historical story and its varied spokesmen by his own personal contemporary story, the basis of which lies in his introductory lines: "I return to Delhi as I return to my mistress Bhagmati when I have had my fill of whoring in foreign lands.... Although I detest living in Delhi and am ashamed of my liaison with Bhagmati, I cannot keep away from either for too long. In these pages, I will explain the strange paradox of my lifelong love-hate affair with the city and the woman."

This is ingenious and understandable for anyone who knows the history of Delhi. The author succeeds in involving the reader in his love-hate affair with the city as it evolves through its undulating history. He is less successful in arresting one's attention by his affair with Bhagmati who, though colourful, is a repetitive, parenthetic interruption, between two dashes in a longish historical sentence.

But as to the history of Delhi and the chapters that the author devotes to them, I mentioned earlier that phases in the city's history come to us in different voices. There is the voice of Musaddi Lal, a Kayastha of Mehrauli, who belongs to the 13th Century A.D. and describes his life under the rule of Ghiasuddin Balban. Through this chapter float the memorable figures and voices of Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusrau. The

next phase brings us all the turbulence of Muslim invaders—Mahmud Ghazni, Mohammad Ghori and the Tughlak dynasty. The first untouchable appears in Chapter 8, to give us a worm's-eye view of Delhi's history under the Mughal Shah Jehan. The untouchable is converted to Sikhism, sees his Guru beheaded, finds the body and lights the Guru's pyre.

There follows Aurangzeb in his authentic voice as the royal son, discriminated against by the Emperor Shah Jehan in favour of Dara Shikoh. Aurangzeb is shown to brood, and wait for vengeance which in time he takes Nadir Shah in a swift invading chapter follows. We then listen with pleasant relief to a poet instead of a Conqueror, for the chapter is allotted to Meer, and we see history through his eyes down to the celebrated verses:

"Ye men of the eastern regions
Knowing my beggarly state you
mock me;
You snigger amongst yourselves
and ask me
Where on earth can you have
come from?
Let me tell you!
There once was a fair city
Among cities of the world the
first in fame:
It hath been ruined and laid
desolate,
To that city I belong, Delhi is its
name."

This brings us inevitably to 1857 and a threnody of voices in

swift juxtaposition to one another of Alice Aldwell, the Anglo-Indian of the Mutiny years, Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor, and Nihal Singh, the Sikh Sepahi who admires and remains loyal to his British Officer, Major Hodson.

The story goes on to the British builders, Lutyens and Baker in Chapter 18 and here the protagonist-narrator reappears to report on his father Sujjan Singh's role in building New Delhi. In due course, we move to 1947 and the Partition of India, the exodus of refugees from the Punjab and the resettlement in Delhi, followed—as now seems inevitable—by the assassination of Gandhi. This is told by a young Hindu from Punjab, Ram Rakha, who has joined the RSS but is horrified when he actually witnesses the assassination. We are brought swiftly up to date with 1984, the assassination this time of Indira Gandhi, followed by the vengeance of the Hindus of Delhi on the Sikh community.

Through this selective history—and we need not quarrel with the selection—as I mentioned earlier the narrator Khushwant Singh, depicted as an ageing reprobate, and Bhagmati his mistress persist. She has that alternate inter-spacing chapter to herself that divides great periods of history and history's identifying episodes. Yet she remains at the end of the book,

at least to me, an interruption, even if an articulate one, a contrived hinge that seeks to hold centuries of history together.

Khushwant Singh's *magnum opus* is not likely to be every Indian's cup of historical tea, the attractions of Delhi notwithstanding, because it designedly would seem, bawdy. Scarcely a page of the Bhagmati chapters is without its record of unrestrained sexual activity and detail. As a novelist, Khushwant Singh has many virtues—vitality, a sense of history, courage, originality, but his most ardent admirer would not claim for him, the gift of understatement. However, he has both historical and political courage, and these are rare. Let me conclude by quoting his judgment on the British period of Delhi's history: "I have seen the city I helped to build and which Lutyens designed for two centuries become ruined in twenty years. We built magnificent buildings which will last for many centuries; they (that is the new generation whom the author is addressing) build shapeless, multi-storeyed offices and jerry houses wherever there is open space, and have smothered hundreds of ancient monuments behind bazaars and markets. We laid wide roads; they make narrow lanes on which two cars cannot pass each other. We planted slow-growing, long living trees which will give shade to our great grand-children and their

great grand-children. They plant quick growing *gul mohur* and laburnums which blossom for a fortnight or two and yield neither fruit nor shade. All they want is something to show in the shortest possible time. They have no sense of the past or the future. As for licking British boots, I tell them that if I was given the choice of being born in any period of Indian history I liked, I would not choose the Hindu or Muslim—not even in the short period of Sikh dominance in the north—but the British. I would re-live my days as a builder-contractor under the British Raj.” And he rises to a climax with: “There was no justice in India till the British came. There will be no justice in India after their impact has worn off.”

It takes courage to say all this in India today, but Khushwant Singh has never lacked courage.

Jehanara Wasi

Lilies That Fester... A Novelette and Four Short Stories by Manorama Mathai: A Writers Workshop Greenbird Book; 1988; pp. 167; Rs 100.

There are various ways of being experimental in writing and Writers Workshop would appear to have dared most of them with some measure of success. The present publication, consisting of

a novelette and four short stories by Manorama Mathai is experimental in attitude rather than form, for though they follow the form of the customary novelette and short story, the attitude implicit in the work is refreshingly new and convincing. It dares to tell the unvarnished truth about what in a woman's life has so far been hidden from and by the wise and prudent in India.

Perhaps we ought to start with the novelette The Marriage of Aley, the last item in the book, that is also its most substantial contribution to the theme of: Do you really want to know what an Indian woman's life is like? Here it is, told not by an idiot, nor full of sound and fury, but infuriatingly frustrating.

The accent in *Aley* is on Kerala's women and destroys for good the superstition that in a matriarchal society, women have it good. They don't. Aley is remarkable precisely because she is so representative of girls from a poor Kerala family. She has three younger brothers, all of whom take precedence over her in their father's scheme of planning. Aley is a clever girl who wins prizes at school and would wish to be a doctor, but there is no money to invest in her education. So she becomes what so many clever, dark-skinned girls from Kerala do become—a nurse. She travels from Kerala to Ludhiana where she serves in a good hospital, earns money

which she sends home, makes at least one friend for life in Sosa, another Kerala girl, maturer than herself, who takes a suitably sombre view of life.

Aley also meets a Dane, Dr Lars Petersen, who is charmed by her and cannot make out why she should be so obsessed with the need to have an arranged marriage on the best possible terms for a dowry-less and dark-skinned girl. He finds her colouring attractive. Aley continues to work hard, earns good money in Kuwait that she remits faithfully to her father who continues to use it to educate her brothers. Inspired by Sosa, Aley buys a trunk and begins to fill it with the small "properties" that she believes will stand her in good stead against her day of marriage. The marriage is, indeed, finally arranged, despite her relatively small dowry and her dark skin, to Skaria, a peevish, stay-at-home asthmatic, who has been pampered all his life by a doting mother and who, taunted by his friends that he is about to marry a working woman who has earned her own money, travelled and will now "boss" him, decides to keep her in her place. How truly maddening this process of being kept in her place can be to Aley, every woman knows, though few men seem entirely able to understand.

Manorama Mathai has several assets as a writer on women; she has the gift of understatement;

she writes simply and truthfully (in films, her work would rank as *cinema verité*). She combines the placidity of a Mrs Gaskell in the Indian situation, with the well-concealed but real indignation of a modern Indian feminist. Through the quiet, controlled portrait of Aley's Kerala Christian marriage, we feel her cumulative bitterness. She has unwisely rejected love to make a traditional marriage that is without love. She lives to witness Sosa's more daring success in Germany, and she knows at last that she must suffer the consequence of her decision to opt for the traditional mainstream for a woman. Mathai is not pointedly didactic, merely quietly realistic. She writes of what tends to happen in situations too familiar to be disputed. If this sort of writing has a fault, it is that it is never allowed to get out of hand and to break into the romantic-fictitious. There are no happy endings here to purge us of sadness. The mirror is just held up to what seems an inevitable conclusion, and it is not happy.

The four short stories vary in quality though all of them partake of the quiet self-assurance of *Aley*. The shortest and perhaps most poignant is *Lakshmi* who has seen her black goat Kalo's throat being cut in the village and connects this gruesome experience with the later experience of being sacrificed to her middle-aged and much-

married husband.

Amini, that is less good, is the story of a woman who overestimates her sons' devotion to her as consistently as she underestimates her pleasant, scholarly husband who finally leaves her to become a *sannyasi*. And there is *Premjit*, a Punjabi girl transplanted to England, who senses that she is about to become another dowry-burning. The story is disturbing and left open-ended, which is wise, though the husband is almost too human to be a convincing murderer. And there is the longest of the short stories, *Sara*, that takes us back

to a Kerala Christian family—Ms Mathai has nothing to learn here—connecting two generations of the same sort of spirited but doomed woman. This is an interesting idea that does not quite come off in the narration.

But the truly encouraging thing about all these designedly discouraging stories is that their author sees life steadily in an area in which nothing but the testimony of so sober a witness can shake the bastions of traditional belief.

Muriel Wasi

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On Music

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad

These days a police officer has been stationed at the Fort near our quarters.* He has a wireless. Occasionally its sounds drift in our direction. Last night the music was very audible. Probably a BBC programme. Some virtuoso on the violin, playing Mendelssohn's famous piece, "Song Without Words". Suddenly a beautiful female voice blended in, with a painful melody. The effect on me was instantaneous, as if a ripe tumour was ready to burst; but this only lasted a few moments. The next instant equilibrium was restored.

Perhaps, you don't know that at one time music had been my passion. It engrossed me for several years. In 1905, when I had completed my studies and started teaching, my love for books often took me to a bookseller, Khuda Bakhsh, whose shop was located on Wellesely Street in front of the Madarsa. He dealt mostly in Arabic and Persian manuscripts. One day, he showed me a beautifully calligraphed and illustrated copy of Faquirullah Saif Khan's *Raag Darpan*, and said that the subject of the book was music. Saif Khan belonged to the nobility during Aurangzeb's reign and was adept in the art and craft of Indian music. He translated a Sanskrit text into Persian that became famous as *Raag Darpan*. The copy that Khuda Bakhsh had acquired, originally belonged to the collection of Nasir Jung Shaheed, the son of Asif Jah, and was very diligently compiled. I was looking through its preface when Mr. Danson Ross arrived. He was then the Principal of Madarsa Aliya, and was proficient in Persian spoken in the Iranian accent. Surprised to see a teenage boy engrossed in the study of a Persian manuscript, he spoke to me in Persian. "Who is the author of this book?" I replied that the book was by Saif Khan on the art of music. He took the book from me and started looking through it. He remarked that the Indian system of music was a very complicated art. Could I comprehend the contents of this book? I said, "When a book is written, it is written solely with the intention that people

* This is a selection from the longest letter in *Ghubar-i-Khatir* about the history and art of music, written by Azad to Nawab Sadr Yar Jung, from the Ahmednagar prison.

should read and understand it. If I read it I would grasp its content." He said with a smile, "You cannot grasp it; if you do, then explain to me the substance of this page." The page that he indicated described some classifications of the ragas. I read the terms but could not comprehend their connotations. Shame-faced, I kept quiet. Finally, I conceded that I could not explain to him the substance right there and then, but would be able to do so after a careful study.

I read the book from beginning to end, but realised that unless one mastered the terminology of music and learnt its elements from an expert, one could not understand the contents of the book. Since my student days I had noticed that I could grasp the substance of a book, leading towards a perfect understanding, just by scanning its pages. Now I was faced with an obstacle, which greatly agitated me. I thought of soliciting the help of somebody who knew music. But who could help? Family circumstances were such that it was unlikely for me to encounter anyone adept in this art. Masita Khan suddenly came to mind. He was the only practitioner in music, who had access to our house.

Masita Khan's story is worth recalling. He came from Sonapat in the Ambala district, and belonged to a family of professional singers. He learnt music from the teachers of the Delhi and Jaipur Gharanas. He gave singing lessons to the dancing girls of Calcutta. In the words of the poet:

Taqrib kuchh to behr-i-mulaqat chahiye!

Ah! but there must be an excuse for meeting.

He used to visit my father in the hope of becoming his disciple. As a rule, my father did not administer the oath of *muridi* to such people, but he did not deny them the privilege of reform and correction. To such people, he would say, "Keep coming without expecting *muridi*. Then accept whatever is God's will." In most cases, people, on their own, gave up their undesirable vocations and repented. Masita Khan, too, got this advice from my father.

After delivering his Friday sermon, my father used to sit for a while in the drawing room before going to his inner chamber. Some of his favoured disciples used to walk down with his palanquin to our place. There they would present their petitions to him. Masita Khan, too, came home every Friday after the sermon, and stood respectfully in one corner, with folded hands. Sometimes, when my father noticed him, he would ask, "Masita Khan, how are you?" He would reply, "I hope to get your kind attention." My father would say, "Well, let there be an honest longing in your heart." Overjoyed, Masita would prostrate himself at my father's feet and drench them with tears. How

beautifully Zauq has written:

Hue hain tar girya-i-nidamat se is quadar aastin-o-daaman

Ke meri tar daamani ke aage arq arq paak daamani hai.

Tears of repentance have so drenched my sleeve and cloak

That the pious robe is drenched in shame before my penitent libations.

Sometimes, he would say, "May I please be allowed to attend the evening assembly?" He was referring to the special evening congregation that was held once a week for the benefit of his disciples. My father used to reject his request, but do so with deep human understanding. "Very well", he would say, "But wait: everything will come about at its proper time." These words were enough to overwhelm his devoted disciple. He would leave with tears of gratitude in his eyes.

His deep devotion and honest quest were ultimately rewarded. My father accepted him as his disciple and even allowed him to attend his discourses. He was so gratified that he gave up teaching the dancing girls, and contented himself with serving a Bengali Zamindar. I have heard my father once say of Masita Khan, "Whenever I see Masita Khan, I am reminded of Pir Changi, the Pir Changi of Maulana Rumi."

Anyway, it was this same Masita Khan I thought of. I took him into confidence on the matter of music. It astonished him a little but as he began to understand my need, he felt flattered by the attention he was receiving from a Pirzada. The problem now was, where? At home, where people read *Hidaiya* and *Mushkawat*, there was no scope for lessons in *sa-re-ga-ma*. Going outside would have roused immense suspicion. One solution emerged which entailed a confidential arrangement. Our sessions were to be held at his home. At the beginning we fixed three days a week, later I started going there every afternoon. Masita Khan used to reach there before me and our music practice sessions went on for two or three hours.

Masita Khan knew only one method of instruction, which is usual with all teachers of this art. He tried to use it on me, but I stopped him and tried to educate myself in my own way. Among all the musical instruments, sitar attracted me the most, and soon my fingers got accustomed to its strings. Now that I think of it I long for those tempestuous music-filled afternoons which reflected the secret longings of my heart. I was no more than seventeen years old, but even at that time I was very particular that whatever field I chose for myself I stepped into it with determination, and proceeded as far as the road led. Whatever the task, I was never content to leave it half way. Whichever alley I entered, I never left before I had walked its length

and breadth. When I was on the path of *savab* (piety) it was with complete sincerity. When I sinned, that, too, was a whole-hearted act. When I kept company with the epicureans, I led the flock. When I travelled with the celibate, I did not lag behind. When I arrived, it was not an apologetic arrival; and when I befriended anyone, it was none but those who were masters in the field.

Thus, when I stepped into the musical world, I explored it as long as I could. For four or five years I practised on the sitar. And not only that. My fingers slowly attained familiarity with the notes hidden in the flute. But it was not long before I lost interest in this art. Then came a time when I gave up this interest altogether, and now it is no more than a memory of bygone days. The marks of the *mizraab*, however, remained on my fingers for a long time!

Ab jis jagah ke dagh hai, yan pehle dard tha.

This was the place of pain, where the bruise is visible now.

In this world of sight and sound, one course to follow is that of the honeybee: it sits on the honey, never to get up again:

Ke paon-tor ke baithe hain pae-band tere

Your prisoners sit at your door, having broken their legs.

The other one is that of the butterfly which sits on every flower, enjoys its fragrance and flies away:

Tuk dekh liya, dil shaad kiya, khush kaam kiya aur chal nikley.

Glanced, gladdened, tasted, and drifted away.

So, this too, was another flower in the many-splendoured garden of my life. I stopped here for a while, enjoyed its fragrance and moved on. The purpose of my interest was that I should not remain unfamiliar with this aspect of life. I believe that one cannot achieve a mental equilibrium and develop an aesthetic temperament without understanding music. When I had achieved my purpose, the continuation of music not only became unnecessary but had the potential of becoming an obstacle to other occupations. The taste for music has, however, become entrenched in my heart and I can never extricate it from my system.

*Jaati hai koi kashmakash andoh-e-Ishq ki
Dil bhi agar gaya to wohi dil ka dard tha.*

Is one ever rid of the agony of love?

Even if the heart is lost, the pain lingers on.

Beauty, whether in sound, or in a face, whether in the Taj Mahal, or Nishat Bagh, beauty is beauty...and it has its natural demands. Pity that miserable soul whose insensitive heart has not learnt how to respond to the call of beauty!

Should I tell you something? I have often fathomed my own heart. I can live happily without anything, but not without music! These pleasant sounds are the acme of my days, the remedy for my mental tensions and the cure for all ills of the body. If you want to deprive me of the few pleasures that are left in my life, deprive me of music and you will have served your purpose. Here, in the Ahmednagar prison, if I miss anything in the evenings it is my radio.

During the days when I practised music, I experienced some of the most poignant moments of my life. Though they were momentary experiences, they left an indelible mark upon me. One such moment occurred during my visit to Agra. It was the month of April and nights of the waning moon. During the last phase of the night I had specially arranged to go to the Taj with my sitar. there I sat on the moonlit terrace, facing the Jamuna.

As moonlight bathed the monument, I would start on a raga on my sitar and become totally engrossed in its melody. How should I express what fantastic sights and sounds danced before my eyes? The dead of night, shimmering stars, the waning moon, dampness of April, the minarets of the Taj raising their heads. All around me, the arches sat holding their breath, and, in the middle, the moonlit silver dome rested motionless on its base. The silver waves of the Jamuna lapped at the base, and, above, the innumerable stars looked on with wide-eyed amazement. In this chiaroscuro, a wordless lament emerged from the strings of my sitar and swam effortlessly on the waves of the air. There were stars shooting from the sky and from my bleeding fingers a melody was born.

For some time, the whole environment remained motionless, as if it were listening with all its attention. Then, slowly, very slowly, everything in the surroundings resumed its motion. The moon continued its celestial journey until it stood over my head, stars would stared with dazed eyes, and the branches of trees swung in ecstasy. One could hear the elements whispering to one another behind the black curtain of night. Often the arches of the Taj shook their shoulders. You may believe it or not, but it is true, that I often talked with those arches; and, whenever I looked up at the silent dome of the Taj, I found its lips quivering.



The Ultimate Word

Raja Rao

I can only go from where I am.* We can only move from where we be: that is if there is movement, going. Gatagatagamyamanam. Change implies the changeless. We live by myths. Myth is just the poetisation of movement, of becoming. Thus sacrifice, yagnya, the symbolic burning by Agni, the fire-god, of the concocted movement, and so of the object. Sanctification is dissolution. Time burnt is poetry made. When time and place are burnt to ash—that is the concrete object is—only light shines over. There is now no one and nowhere to go.

But I am here. Every movement I make is samskara, ritual, every statement I make the sanctifying word, mantra. In this ambit of sacrifice, with the pragmatic statement of who I am, and where I am placed, I speak. Let me start, as my Vedic ancestors did, of where I am. In every statement of sacrifice my ancestors spoke of the mythic Mount Meru (whether it is beyond the Pamirs, as some have explained, or beyond the beyond, who cares?—South of the Mount Meru, one said at the sacrificial hearth, and in the Jambu Dvipa (the isle of the Jujube fruit) down the Himalaya, and south of the Godavary, I sit, I used to say, on the bank of the Cauvery—here I sit, I so and so, Ramakrishna Sharma, etc. etc. Also I would add, I am, say, in Kaliyuga, add in the twenty seventh year of the sixty year cycle, on the twenty eighth day of the lunar month, and on this star-conjunction of Rohini or Aswini—I sit for sacrifice. Look, look, how the fire burns, it burns royally. This same fire, remember, kept safely and well-fed in its earthen-pot, and in its pure proper corner, will also burn me—burn me when I am dead. Someone, my son, will keep the cremation fire burning till all my body is consumed, and he will then throw the firewood poker into the subsiding flame. Then when all is burnt, he goes home, the son, whosoever he is, and wheresoever I am. And his, the son's turn too will come, (for, as you see, everything turns

* Keynote address given at the South Asian Language Association Conference, at The University of Texas at Austin, Spring 1984.

in a mandala, a circle,) and when his head burst too, sometime later,—where has he gone, I ask of you? He, if he could speak, could say, where? nowhere. Is can never become. The myth of I (sitting to the south of the Meru, etc.)—I, of the ancestry of Angirasa (the great Vedic sage, etc.), I never was, I never will be. The myth was exploded by fire (my head did, of course)—and nothing ever happened. And that's delight, pure poetry.

But, today, translating that tradition, we might say, something like this. I, this genetic complex, born of many million years of copulations, and living on a speck of dust, called bhu, the earth, rotating in a mandala form, around a planet called the Sun—the Sun Principle, Savitr, hymned in the celebrated Gayatri verse—Gayatri called the mother of the Vedas, and chanted to this day as the very essence of Indian thinking—

Tat Savitr varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi....
(That magic splendor of the Solar-truth
he of Light, we contemplate
and may he quicken our intellect.)

and living then in this ever-circling universe, with other planets ever in bigger and wider mandalas, up to what today one calls, the Black Hole (a name, which like any myth, means more than it says) and maybe there are other universes beyond, so we have been recently told,—universes whose vibrations reach us this millionth of a second, but then that vibration was sent before this earth ever came to be this earth by a strange cosmological accident arising, rotating, and since at that moment my Vedic ancestor did not exist, I should ask myself, *who* am I then? Who indeed? That's the stuff of poetry. Aham is kavya. I am is poetry. Aham is gnyana, I am is wisdom. Aham is paramamantra, I the magic incantation. The poet is the sage. I am, like my legendary ancestor Angirasa was, a kavi.

ātmaivedam agra āsīt...so' nuvikshya nanyād ātmano pashyat.
so'ham asmiti agre. vyāharat: tato'ham nāmā-bhavat.

*In the beginning there was only the self. Looking around
he saw nothing else than the self. He first said "I am". Therefore
arose the name I.*

B.U. 1.4.1.

So there is only one poet.: The "I" of the I. The atman beyond jiva. He is no one. He is. Is is. And so it. Call It, Brahman, if you like.

"The Brahman," says the Vākayapadiya, "the Brahman who is without beginning or end, whose very essence is the Word (sabda),

who is the cause of the manifested phonemes, who appears as the objects, from whom the creation of the world (seems to) proceed. Brahman is called Phoneme (akshara) because It is the cause of the phoneme." Thus begins Vākayapadiya, the celebrated text on: The Phrase and the Word. And Bhartrhari, its great author, continues,

Idam ādyam padasthānam sidhi sopānaparvanām

Iyam sām mokshamānāmāṃ ajihma rājapaddhatih.

This is the first step in the ladder leading to salvation: this is the first royal road for all those who desire liberation.

Siva, another name for It, Brahman, is the still masculine power. And She Parvathi the play. The unmoving desires to play with itself, and so the abstract became concrete, and mountains rose, and the swift, lispig, gurgling rivers, so that the crops could flourish, and the humans, the cows and the elephants bathe in the flowing waters. And seeing their own faces, ask themselves the question: Who is it that sees? Does he who sees seen by that which see back?—Or is it just play? The question needs the answer. Would Shiva in his Himalayan retreat, by the lake, Manassarovar, have the answer? The water mirrors both the faces. Is, *āp*, water then the meaning? Is water flow? And when it does not flow, say in the Manassarovar, Lake of the Mind, is the lake not water? Water is just water, pure water. "Salila eko drastā dvaito bhavathi."¹ Is meaning then the face without face? So, the snout that asks the question to the snout below seen in the water, realizes, in meaning there is no snout, and meaning just life, goh. So the cow becomes, light. And Ganesha, the Lord of Wisdom has an elephant's head, snout and all. The question asking the question back is poetry. *Kratyantu kratyavaha*. (R.V. 10.64.2) "The poetic thought sees itself seeing."

Since we have the mountains and the waters, the trees and the moon, man and woman, why not play? So we give names to objects. Nāmadheya, like we give names to chess pieces: the horse, the elephant, the fortress, the Prime Minister or Raja, the King. Now the names are made of phonemes, graphics of breath. So, to name precisely, we must modulate our breath. That is Yoga. Suppose then, the yogi modulates his breath with such strictness, precision, as the word would say itself totally—such a vibration then be its true, whole name.

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Imagine then, sitting by some Mount Meru, in the Manassarovar of my mind, I vibrate the sound of the object, what would happen, what should happen? Since the object is vibration, and I vibrate the vibration of the object, would not the object appear and say: Look,

here I am. So, pure naming is pure creation. Therefore it is said: first there was the word—Vac created the World. Poetry now becomes the paradigm of the creator creating universes. You see, we are once again playing. The game, any game is a paradox, and paradox puzzle, and puzzle poetry.

Brihaspate prathamam vacho agram, yat prauratha
nāmadhéyum dadhanam (R.V. 10.71).

When Brihaspati, (of the family of Angirasa) the first of
Speech, and the foremost

The sages uttered giving the unnamed a name.

Then it goes on:

Utatvam pashyan na dadarsha etc., etc.

There is a man who sees but has not seen Vac, There is a
man who hears but who has not heard her, But to another
she reveals her lovely form, like a young wife, finely robed
to her husband.

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There is in the same Rig Veda, a magnificent, famed fable. It is called Purusha Suktha, the hymn of Primal-man.

Sahsra sirsha purushaha sahasrakshaha sahsrapāth etc. The Primal man, Purusha, he is there before anything ever was. The gods were created after Him. The gods wishing to sacrifice, that is made sacred, wished to make the very best offering they could for Sacrifice. And what could that be but the primal man, Purusha himself. So, they tied him with sacrificial grass, while spring became the ritual butter, and summer the sacrificial wood, our beloved sharad rtu, the autumn, became the oblation. And from this first sacrifice came all objects: cows and horses, hymns and melodies, chandas, poetic meters, the sacrificial word.

tasmād yagnyāth sarva huthaha,

Richas sāmāni jagniré,

chandāsi jagniré.

tasmāth yajus tasmāth ajāyatha. etc. etc.

(R.V. 10.90.9)

From that sacrifice, fully offered,

The Rice and Saman (Vedas) were born,

And metrics was of that

And from that again was the Yajus born

Thus poetics arose out of the sacrificing of sacrifice at sacrifice:
yagnena yagnyam ayajanthu dévāh

The word then ended in pure meaning, in ritual ash, vibhūthi. The meaning is Shiva dancing in the crematorium. And there is utsāha, there delight.

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Dusk falls on the Indian earth, South of the Meru, down below the Himalayas, and further still down the Vindhya, etc., etc., lies the famous capital, called the City of Victory, Vijayanagara, founded by the great sage Vidyaranya, and destroyed by the so-called monotheist Turcoman conquerors. They took five whole months to destroy every temple, tear down the faces of our gods, break the heads of stone elephants at the palace entrances, while our women unwilling to be defiled, burnt themselves alive, and their ashes have mingled with the earth, from which today grasses arise. The cows graze between the ruins of this historic city—a city where Venetians came to buy our diamonds and the Conquistadors to sell arms and military training, to this one and then the other, helping to fight, Raja and nawab against nawab and Raja. Today even the flower-seller street, once half a league long², is now lived in by the panther and the porcupine. The sages, so the tradition says, have retired into the immense round hill behind by the river, once in a while at night, so people say, a cowherd will see lights on the top of the hill moving and circling, and disappearing.

The cows drink, after grazing, the waters of this Southern river, which Sri Rama himself had crossed with Sita, and Sayana, the brother of the founder of Vijayanagara, so it is said, later, of course much later, had composed his famous commentaries on the Vedas hereabouts. And once a year, for a month, as everybody around knows, the Ganga visits the river, so that, we poor men and kine, can bathe therein, washing away our transgressions. And as the cows walk back home, delighting in the thoughts of returning to their calves, move, the dust settles on itself, with the dusk suddenly falling. The cows have many sacred names—Ganga, Gowrie and Tungabhadra. They walk one step, two steps and three steps, amidst these ruins, and four, just as they had done at dawn. In general the Primordial word (pada) is that of the cow. The cow carries thrice seven names.

Vākena Vākam dvipada, chatushpada akshréna mimate sapta vānihi.

With the power of the Vāk, Vāk was measured out, with the two-footed and the four-footed, and with Akshara they measured out the seven metres.

The two-footed is the common speech, and the four-footed is the

chatushpada Atma. The seven feet are of course the seven metres Gayatri, Ushnik, Anusthup, Brihati, Viraj, Trishtup and Jagathi. According to Sayana, Akshara is at once the word and the cow. It is the cow, in fact, who carries all names. Her hidden feet hide the names. Her secret name is the great secret knowledge which "the poet searches in revelation." It is because of this variable that the pada, "footstep, traces of the footstep," has taken on the commonplace word, pada. "En générale," continues Renou, in his great introduction³, "en générale le (parole) *pada*, primordiale, est celui de la Vache. La Vache porte trois fois sept noms-trihsapta nāmāghnya bibharti." He who knows the padas should teach them like a vidwan, knower of the word, and of footsteps. "Soma and Agni are padaviḥ kavīnam—it's they who have instituted the poetics, Kāvya." The open itself is a milking cow, which without the cowherd goes her own way—carantim... agopām. When the spoken word was given to man, she allowed herself to be milked in four parts. It is the divaspayah, milk of the heavens. (R.V. 10.114)

"When the first dawn shone, the great (thing) the word akshra took birth, on the spot of the cow's feet."

Like the four padas, the four feet of the cow, are the four states of Vac, the word. These four states are: Vaikhāri, the spoken word, the non-supreme energy, the apara, the pronounced—then the madhyama, between the speech and the mental formulation, and behind it again, is the pashyanthi, the seen but not formulated, the upsurge, and finally the Para Vāk, the Ultimate word, the silence beyond silence, the origin and the end of the phoneme. Therefore is poetics (or grammatology) a way to salvation (moksha). The poet (or the grammarian) the sage.

Taking his stand on the essence of the Word, lying beyond the activity of breath (prana), resting in oneself with all sequence eliminated. After having purified speech, and after having rested it on the mind, after having broken its ponds and made it bondfree—after having reached the inner light, he with knots cut, becomes united with the Supreme Light.⁴ (kyapadiyam: 1.131)

And this is sabdapurva yoga. Meanwhile let us go back to the four feet of the Cow.

When the Supreme Word, says Abhinavagupta, when it divides itself, one says its body becomes triple, and it is then called pashyanthi, madhyama and vaikhāri, which is crude.

The Ultimate Word, can it ever become human? one may ask. The answer is simple. Just as Shiva created Parvathi to play with, in dance or chess, so the ultimate silence or Para Vāk wanted to play with itself, and created its three states. And again just as nothing happened to Shiva when Parvathi and he played, the Para Vāk is inherent in every word, however gross it might seem. And poetry then is exercise, the sadhana, by which you get back, seek back if slowly from the expression to the expressed, from existence to essence, from vaikhāri to the para.

"All things" continues Abhinavagupta, "the stones, the trees, the birds, the men, the gods, the demons are all nothing else but the venerable Supreme Word in the form of Shiva—Sarvasarvatmanaiva parameshwara rupinaste iti"

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We Indians, as you know, we love numbers. Or is it that numbers love us. (May I remind you, your numerals came from us). We love to talk of the three gunas, the four estates of man, the nine rasas, and so on. In fact in discussion between pundits, even today, according to the context, you say three or four or nine, often only showing your fingers, meaning the gunas, the estates, the asramas or the nine rasas. How impressive and how ridiculous scholars can be. I am of course talking of Indian pundits. Once recently when I asked a Pundit in Madras what *tamas* meant in the Vedas—it meant darkness or just dusk, as some have interpreted it, my Pandit, rings on his fingers, shawl on his shoulders, chewing his betel, going to spit off the veranda every ten minutes, showed me seven fingers meaning there are seven interpretations. He never once said what his own opinion was. Maybe Pundits are not allowed to have opinions. But not being a Pundit, I can say, maybe dusk is a better word, or twilight, than darkness for *tamas* in the Vedas. It fits better with the meaning, whether Sayana has explained it thus or not.

But to come back to my subject. Man has not only four estates, but has four *avasthas*, conditions, states. They are, from the Vedic times: the waking state, the dream state, and the deep sleep state, and the final or *Turiya*, where even the trace of the ego may not exist, where it is dormant in the third state. You remember the famous beginning of the *Mandukya Upanishad*: *Aum* iti etad aksharam idam sarvam. *Aum*, this syllable indeed is all this. *Sarvam* hi etad brahma, *ayam* atma brahma, so *yam* atma catus-pat. All this is verily brahma. This self is Brahman. This same self has four quarters. And it goes on to say, the first symbolised by *A* is the person in the waking state, who cognizes external objects, who has seven limbs and nineteen

mouths, and who enjoys gross material objects. (You see we never forget numbers). The second one symbolised by U is the person in the dream state, he who cognizes internal objects, who also has seven limbs, nineteen mouths, etc., etc. But then we come to the deep sleep state, the third position, indicative of the M sound. In this state we just have prajnanaghana, a mass of consciousness. However we still have here, a discreet, resting ego. Finally, when we come to Turiya, the fourth state—with the long unending bindu, the ultimate M sounding vibration, there where Shiva and Parvathi unite, becoming a “creative resonance.” There is neither an internal nor an external object, but is just pure consciousness—it is adrishtatma, unseen, unconnected with the world, avyavaharam, etc. It is just shantama Shivam, advaitam—peace, auspiciousness, non-duality. Sa atma, sa vijñaniva. He is the self. He is to be known. It then is the source, Light and source, of Abhinavagupta's pratyavimarsha, becoming conscious of one's beingness.

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“Le jour commence,” says Valery, in his famous journal, “le jour commence par une lumière plus obscure que toute nuit... Un homme (he continues) qui s'éveille est me semble il-il,... *a l'état de pureté du moi.*” Then at another place, he says: “Je uis a l'analogie de ce qui est. Je suis encore, O delice, que quelque chose egale a l'ensemble de feu, de soie, d'ardoise, de vapeur et de musique brute simultanee. Je suis un effet de la lumière.” And again: Comme je sens a cette heure (Aube): la profondeur de l'apparence (je ne sais l'exprimer) et ceci qui est poesie.”⁵ And for ever Valery asks himself: Qui suis-je? Qui suis-je? Who am I? O my presence with a face, seeing without seeing anything or any one. “La conscience semble un miroir D'eau. Consciousness seems a mirror of water.” Thus the moi pur.

“The object of the conscious man is the consciousness itself.” (“L'objet de l'homme conscient est la conscience meme.”) And his faithful critic, George Poulet⁶, explains: Moi qui pense et qui me pense, je m'avere le meme qui le moi qui est pense...Sujet et objet ne font qu'un, un seule moi pensent et se pensent.” I who thinks and that which thinks me, I realize, is the same as the I who is thought of....The subject and object are one, the I thinking and thinking (on) itself.” Thus the pure “I” of Valery. “What could be more ‘poetic’ than to start working than this irreducible power, which is the same for each one of us, which coincides exactly with ourselves, which moves us, which speaks to us and speaks to itself in us.” So once again the “I” (the Aham of Sanscrit poetics), the “I” is—poetry.

“If I have,” says Valery in his famous essay called: Introduction

to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci, "if I have brought the reader to this solitude, and to this desperate clarity, it is because it was necessary to carry the idea that I have formed of intellectual power to its ultimate consequence. The human characteristic is consciousness... the pure *ego*, the unique and continuous element in each being of the world which has no name, no history, this deep *note* of existence itself, dominates the whole complication of existence from the moment it's heard." This pure *ego* then becomes, as it were, "no less real than the centre of gravity of a planetary system." "In this condition," continues Valéry, he, the being, "immolates in one instant, his individuality. He feels himself pure consciousness, and two of that cannot exist. He is the I, the pronoun of universality, the name of *that* which has no relation to existence." "La meilleure image du Moi est bien le Zero." The best image of the I indeed is Zero.

But then he did not know, or remember, if you like,—zero itself, the very word, is linguistically and historically a child of India, through its many itinerant transformations, *sunyata*, pure emptiness equates Nirvana. Pure ego then is the state of being, in its natural state, the condition of the end of Becoming, as the Buddha has defined. And later, in his celebrated hymn, the *Nirvanashatakam*, Shri Shankara the greatest sage and metaphysician after the Buddha, has sung, *Mano Budhi, ahankara chittani naham... Shivoham, Shivoham*. I am not the mind, intelligence, the myness, or conceptual activity... I am Shiva, I am Shiva, the Absolute.

What then this condition of pure being? There are many many statements on the Pure Ego state or the *I* state (to go back to Valéry) but I will take the description from Mallarmé, the unique teacher, le Maître of Paul Valéry—Mallarmé *the founder of modern poetry*. There would never have been not only a Paul Valéry without Mallarmé, but neither Joyce nor Eliot, neither Stefan Georg—nor even Alexander Blok. Or again Rainer Maria Rilke.

"Je viens de passer," Mallarmé wrote to his closest friend, the poet Henri Gazalis (Jean Lahor) "*unée effryanate: Ma Pensée s'est pensée, et est arrivée a une Conception pure. Tout ce que, par contre-coup, mon être a souffert, pendant cette longue agonie est inénarrable, mais, heureusement, je suis parfaitement mort, et la région la plus impure ou mon Esprit puisse aventurer est l'éternité, mon Esprit, ce solitaire habituel de sa propre Pureté, que n'obscurcit plus le reflet du Temps.*"

"Malheureusement, je en suis arrivé la par une horrible sensibilité... Mais combien plus je l'étais il ya plusieurs mois, d'abord dans ma lutte avec ce vieux et méchant plumage terrassé heureusement, Dieu. Mais, but the terrible fight against god took me to the great

Darkness, Tenebres, after which the poet fell, "je tombai, victorieux eperdument et infiniment," till one day he saw himself in a mirror and recognised himself as he was many months earlier. But, he continues, the devastation left by that experience was so great, if he were not before the mirror now, "I will rebecome nothingness: Je redeviendrais le Néant."—"C'est t'apprendre que je suis maintenant impersonnel and non plus Stefane que tu as connumais une aptitude qu'a l'Universe spirituel a se voir et se developper, a travers ce qui fut moi." Then he goes on to say: Poetry takes the place in me of love, because it is, poetry is, is in love with itself, and its sensuousness falls deliciously on my soul. And he remarks, it would be a great and painful "serrement de coeur," despair, in case when he enters his supreme Disappearance, he had not finished his "work, which is The Work, the Great Work, as said the great alchemists, our ancestors."

To another friend, also a poet, Eugene Lefébure, he writes: Destruction was my Beatrice. And in a letter to Villers d'Isle Adam, he states he would now like to write a book on Absolute beauty. "You will be terrified to know that I have come to the Idea of the Universe only through sensation (and that, for example, to keep an ineffable notion of pure Nothingness, I had to impose on my mind the sensation of absolute emptiness.)"

And again and again Mallarmé protests, his Nothingness was not the Buddhist Nothingness. But does it matter? Where one is, is there a name, Buddhist or Non-Buddhist for that state. The Buddha, as all oriental scholars know, refused to name that condition. It is a state where every impression has vanished, except it. Isness is. Is is all that remains: the Pure Ego, of Valéry.



The ultimate word in reality is any word. For all words arise from this same Isness, and the end of the sound, sabda goes back to It. Hence this It is also called Sabdabrahman, the Brahman, the Absolute of the (Sounding) word. For inside of each one of us is the anahata, the unstruck sound, the active silence from which all sounds arise, as music or as word, the *note* of Valéry. In a penetrating essay, published by Christopher Middleton, on "Rilke's Birth of Venus," he uncovers the sound structure of this poetic poem. And he comes to the conclusion that Rilke used AUM as the "nuclear sound pattern in the whole poem. One could extend this sound," continues Middleton, "to include the role of α as alpha and μ as omega in the pith series of German vowels: the first and last things in the universe. With M as its axis, the poem would then voice the equilibrium attained by the magical universe of the alphabet at the moment of Aphrodite's birth."

Aumkāra ātmaiva, samviśaty

So concludes the Mandukyopanishad, belonging to the Atharva Veda—

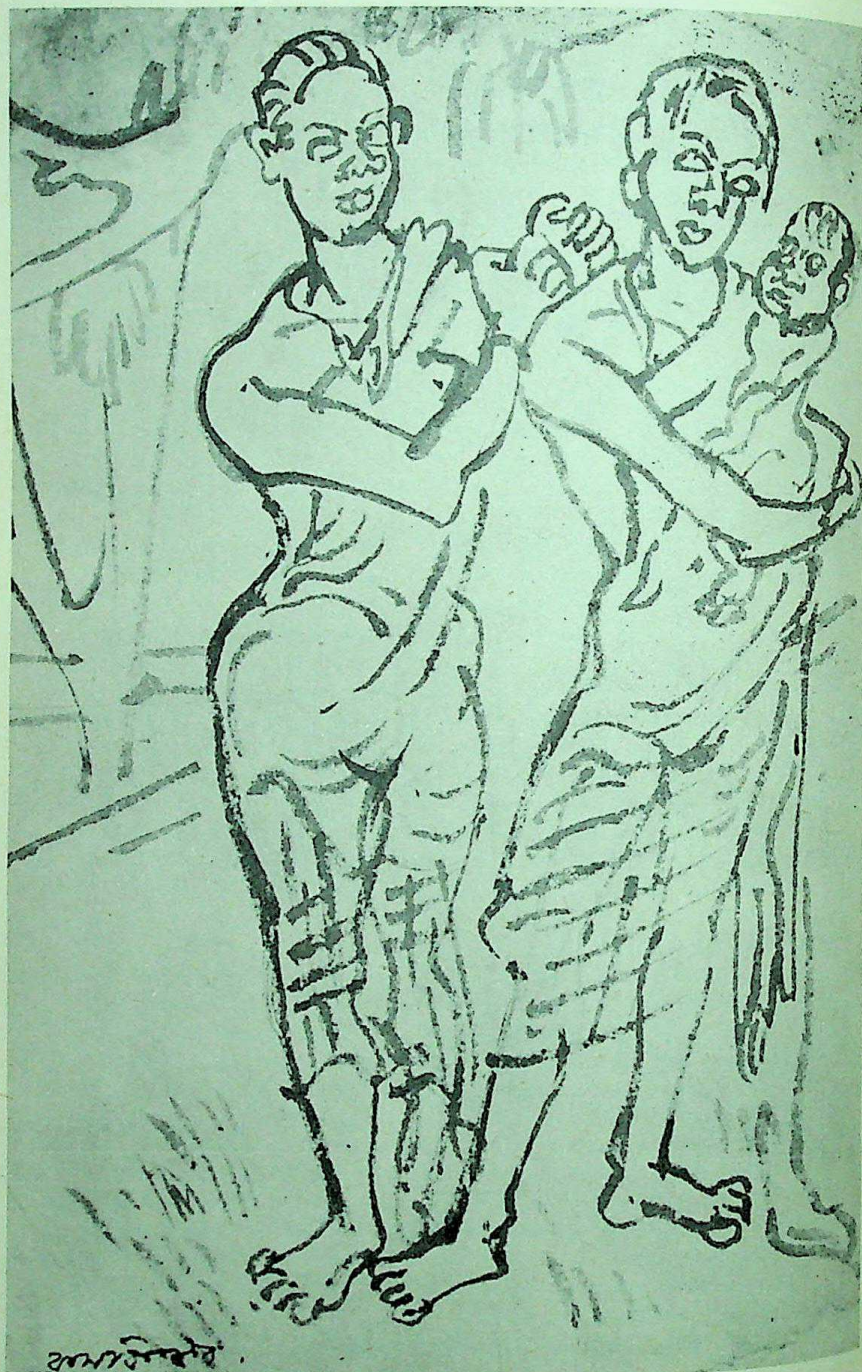
ātmanātmānam ya evam veda.

Aum indeed the I. He who knows it enters the I with his I. Thus I go to where I am.

References

1. The Principal Upanishads, by S. Radhakrishnan, Allen and Unwin, London: He becomes (transparent) like water, one the Seer without duality.
2. Études Védiques et Pānin Éennes, Tom, I, by Louis Renou, de Boccard, Paris: "Roses are sold everywhere. These people could not live without roses." Abdur Rezzak.
3. Bhartihari by K.A. Subramania Iyer, Deccan College, Poona: Etudes vediques et Panineennes. Paris, 1935. Its introduction has been the basis of much of this section of my essay.
4. Vākyapadiya (I). Translated by K.A. Subramania Iyer, Deccan College, Poona: Vā.
5. Recherches Sur La Symbolique et L'Energie De La Parole dans Certain Textes Tantriques by André Padoux, de Boccard, Paris: "The day begins," says Valery, in his famous journal, "the day begins with a light more obscure than all of night... A man," he continues "wakes up, it would seem.... in the state of the pure I."—"I am the analogue of what is. I am still, O delight, something equal to the whole of fire, silk, clay, stream, and raw music together. I am an effect of light." "When I feel at that hour (of dawn) the depth of appearance, (I do not know how to say it)—it is this which is poetry."
6. Georges Poulet, Entre Moi et Moi. Jose Corti, Paris: From whom I have taken many of these quotations.
7. Mallarmè: Correspondences, I. Gallimard, Paris: I have just gone through a frightening year: my Thought thought itself (in) and came to a Pure conception. All that, as a consequence, my being has suffered, during that long agony, cannot be related, but happily, I am perfectly dead, and the most impure region where my spirit can adventure is Eternity my Spirit, this solitary inhabitant of his own Purity, which obscures no more the reflection of time. Unhappily I came to it through an horrible sensibility. But how much more I was, some months ago, in the fight with the wicked plumage, happily flattened down; God. This is to let you know that I am now impersonal and not anymore the Stefane you have known—but an aptitude which the Spiritual Universe has to see itself and to develop, through that which was once I."
8. Selected Writings of Paul Valery, New Directions, New York.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*.



Protest Literature

C.D. Narasimhaiah

I am obviously not a practitioner of Protest Literature but someone greatly interested in driving it to a corner and knowing its whole truth what with the prominence it has acquired today. Meanwhile I have some vague notions which I would like to share with you. As I have tried to say in my note, accompanying the invitation, protest has figured in literature through the ages in one form or another. The sages of the Upanishads protested against the gods of the Vedas and the Buddha protested against the practices of both including their language. Hence the coming into prominence of Prakrit and Pali dialects, a breakthrough in the creative medium of art. One has reasons to suspect—such was his devotion to Buddha—T.S. Eliot was partly at least, inspired by Buddha's teachings in his conviction that sensibility alters from generation to generation but expression is altered only by a man of genius. That is by the way.

Now it is one of the rudiments of religious thought that except for Hinduism which, paradoxically, has a built-in genius to generate protest continually and absorb it in its mainstream as it goes on, all religions—Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism had their origin in protest. So did systems of philosophy both here and in Europe. As for science, it thrives on protest against organized religions like Christianity. And X-anity certainly did protest against science and branded great inventors and discoverers heretics, not realising they were destined to be honoured as prophets, heralding a new era. In political thought protest has been the staple of life resulting in either beheading a ruler or his overthrow.

Is protest, then, a law of life that it can be so pervasive? Did ancient Indians therefore in their wisdom provide for it by their exhortation of 'charaiveti! charaiveti!' 'March on, march on o ye traveller?' cautiously indicating the very mode of marching on through their concept of *Neti*, the intellectual counterpart of Keat's negative capability, not an irritable reaching after fact or reason but through 'evaporation of opposites', which one like Blake called 'progression through contraries'.

All of which conclusively proves that Truth has many facets but each of us, individuals and groups, tends to think that he alone has perceived truth, that indeed he has a monopoly of it and so adopts a 'holier than thou' stance. And anyone who has reservations is accused of rocking the boat. But what do the helpless do?—the deprived or the dispossessed, be it woman against man, servant against master, employee against employer, subjects against rulers, the black against white, the alien against the citizen, the minority against—an interminable catalogue!

A high school teacher in a Canadian play makes his students recite the names of all the wives of Henry VIII while a protest march is going past the window. He tells them they aren't in school to watch parades. Which just about sums up Canadian history and culture as against that of their big brother who worked his way to the top of the world by his constant protest to make it new. It sums up the Indian attitude too, of the colonial period. Robert Clive writes home that as a handful of British soldiers were entering Murshidabad Indian men, women and children had lined up on both sides of the road. 'If only', he adds, 'each of them had taken up a stone or stick and hurled it at us, where would we have been?' The fact is we did not. Did we believe in the art of persuasion? For protest succeeds when persuasion fails. Which means protest is an extremist stance, accompanied by pressure, even strong-arm methods, the price privilege pays for its aggrandisement.

Consider in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* how the sprightly Ariel's gentle plea 'Master, my freedom' receives rebuff from Prospero 'Dost thou remember how I freed thee from the witch Sycorax?' And he counts his blessings. As for Caliban, his extremist stand provokes an equally barbaric reaction from the civilized Prospero who now is on his way to a state of *stitha prajna*, as we Indians are fond of describing him. Prospero says: For this, be sure, to-night

thou shalt have cramps
thou shalt be pinched
As thick as honeycomb each
more stinging than the
bees that made them.

What must not be forgotten is that in protesting against Prospero and in seeking to violate the honour of his daughter Caliban sets up Stephano and Trinculo to overthrow Prospero and takes a drunken butler for a god—he would even be his bootlicker! thus exchanging one master for another. Here is protest in its crudest form, it degrades both, calling attention to an examination of its causes, consequences,

indeed, its many implications. For earlier in his career Shakespeare let Shylock make a passionate plea for compassion and understanding. Perhaps it failed to elicit response, or perhaps later in his life there were unsuspected developments such as Colonization and what it brings in its train and so felt obliged to *enact* its different dimensions.

An unpretentious tale like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did more to bring about a change of heart than the powerful Swiftian satire could. As Leavis has remarked Swift is a writer of great power, but power wasted. Yeats who protested against the British, because their actions called for so much sacrifice on the part of Irish patriots, could believe that 'a terrible beauty is born'. It's a true poet's perception of the tragedy. Hence also his belief England may still keep her faith for all she has said and done. How different was his countryman Bernard Shaw and his mentor, the Norwegian Ibsen whose *Doll's House*, especially, became the rage of Feminist movements all over the world. Both Ibsen and Shaw cut the ground from under their own feet by protesting too much, a phrase packed with meaning for this Seminar. It is sad that Shaw's admirers were obliged to abandon their efforts to raise a fund to perpetuate his memory—so poor was the response of the public which only a decade before had willingly paid through their nose to enjoy his protests on the stage. Interestingly it is the less known Irish Synge that didn't protest but dived deep into the hearts of widows and orphans, blindmen and beggars that turned out to be more influential.

The spokesmen of protest poetry in this country recalled Donne's description of the sun as that 'busy old fool', or someone else's reference to the drunken clouds, or in English writing itself, an Arun Kolatkar let his narrator say he popped a stone into his mouth and 'spat out a god'. But it's good to remember the upanishadic seer too showed great daring when he protested "O sun of effulgent glory, take off that disc, for the Purusha behind it is the same as within me." To a Kalidasa the cloud is the bearer of lover's tidings to the beloved and as for stones the Indian with his abiding faith in the unity of creation invested every rock, river, tree, bird and beast with divinity. And by so doing helped to expand the consciousness, open up the channels of feeling and inculcate humility by the realization that he was not the hub of the universe.

What did the Western iconoclast gain by his kind of protest? Shock people out of complacency? After the shock, where is the healing? Leave the wounds to fester! An attitude tantamount to

Mischief, thou art afoot
Take what course thou wilt

All right in politics, not in literature! No, not even in politics. The incredible success of the Gandhi film has given the lie to the validity of protest politics in the four corners of our degenerate world. The Gandhi whose watchword was protest against the white rule chose to withdraw his Civil Disobedience Movement as he heard St. Paul's Cathedral was bombed by Hitler, because for him it was the same whether it was St. Paul's Cathedral or the Viswanath Temple at Kasi. Besides he didn't wish to make England's difficulty his opportunity.

Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* which enacts this brave suffering for a great cause is far more successful poetry than his Ode to the West Wind, an example of egotistic sublime. A Hopkins who protests to God in the first half of the poem

'Why do sinners' ways prosper?

concludes it by praying

'Send my roots rain, O Lord of life'

If you could suffer one more example, Eliot's 'Ash Wednesday' which begins with

Because I cannot hope to turn

Because I cannot hope'

ends with the acceptance:

Although I cannot hope

This is the line of protest to which also belong the saint and mystic poets of India and of course those young rebels like Savithri, Ekalavya, Nachiketa, Prahlada and Dhruva.

Protest in the sense in which we understand it today, alienates those against whom it aims: it might alienate one from oneself too. Referring to Brutus's betrayal of Caesar and his consequent assignment by Dante to the lowest circle of Hell, E.M. Forster prays that he may have the strength to betray his country rather than his friend.

If protest has not much justification in politics, what of its place in art and literature whose function is to explore the layers of the self and examine unseen connections between individuals and between them and the society? and heal the tissues of the spirit? Protest curtails the choice, inhibits exploration of alternatives, blocks the channels of feeling and its very language narrows the area of the thinkable.

In protest literature, *literature* seems the first casualty! It is argued, though, that not to protest encourages acceptance of hegemony of customary centres of power. Who can say that the blackman isn't right in protesting that the rhythms of Bach, Beethoven and Mozart

were all right for Yeats and Eliot but not for those who weep and laugh loudly and walk and talk vigorously? He demanded a different poetics which could accommodate *his* notions of art 'Black is Beautiful'. I should hasten to add, though, that Senghor who endeavoured to erect 'Negritude' into a pervasive canon, a governing metaphor, is fast losing support of the sensitive and the discerning among Blacks themselves, Wole Soyinka and David Rubadiri among them.

The Australian poet who had neither the nightingale nor the daffodil and had to live with the ugly, abominable lizard, learnt after many protests to make poetry out of it, a poetry which extended the frontiers of art:

"Courage, good fellow
We live by the folly of spring"

says the uncouth lizard to the bard! And his words have for the poet the good breath of a ballad which meant a new freshness and vigour in poetry. Another poet protested against the lush jungle of modern thought which was Europe-centred and learnt to put his faith in the 'Arabian desert of the human mind' because, 'still from the deserts prophets come'.

Protest literature, then, may examine what are its chances of being looked up to by those who despise it. That is something which the literary followers of public men like M.N. Roy, Ambedkar, Lohia and the Sikh Gurus have to ponder. Protest, I submit, *may* not be a great gospel to preach. But as I posited earlier my education in this area leaves much to be desired.

This I know that the one thing our protest writers must guard against is the enslavement of the mind—not to owe allegiance to men or movements in politics or religion but to be committed to their art—a poet, said Yeats, (I catch myself quoting him tirelessly but also helplessly, he is so relevant) by serving his art with utter integrity serves the nation also. Which does not exclude raw life around; on the contrary, absorb all contraries into the crucible of its soul. Men and movements are important to the extent they can enrich and illuminate life and win attention to the inter-connectedness of their social, political or moral preoccupations—a writer's profound responsibility to life. Put simply, it must eschew any palpable design on the reader; the reader has a right to protest, too! And must be respected.

We should constantly remind ourselves literature is an imaginative experience. And what the imagination seizes as truth can alone be true. Not a tautology, for Truth, let me repeat what I said earlier, has many facets and it is doing violence to the Holy Ghost to suppress or play up any aspect of it is at the expense of the others. The reason

why Iago and Imogen get equal attention at the poet's hands.

I should like to conclude with a mention of our Jain writers who saw no small merit in Ravana without minimising or distorting Sri Rama's greatness. There and in the Bhakti poets of our land is an example which protest writers do well to emulate. I almost said they should summon courage to speak of their leaders and masters as the Zen Master did when he asked his disciples: 'If you meet the Buddha, kill him', because presumably, he is an impediment to the *pursuit* of Truth. Precisely what Herman Hesse has done in *Siddartha*, where he suggests profound reservations in respect of what, ostensibly, he has set out to celebrate.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*.

To Revise or Not to Revise

Nissim Ezekiel

My paper is longer than Hamlet's well-known speech, but shorter than the play. If I had to state my personal credo on this theme, in the context of writing poetry, it would merely be: Revise or Be Damned. And I would extend that to a principle of all human thought as well as action. To revise implies, at its simplest, to reconsider and be willing to improve, which raises the first complicating factor in the argument. What if revision makes worse instead of improving? Suppose reconsideration ends by watering down, compromising, obscuring instead of making more precise? So, before we have even started recommending revision or opposing it we are in the jungle of life's normal circumstances with such weak tools as reason and experience to cope with them. We may strengthen ourselves with certain other tools, which are not tools at all but resources: intuition, imagination and what I venture to call the mysteries of process. I refuse to call them tools because their existence is not definable in the same terms as logic, the reliable cause and effect equation.

That which is beyond revision is the historically authoritative scriptures. We call them, on which only commentaries are possible. The myth of inspiration is absolute in such cases. Moses *received* the Ten Commandments, and if Hollywood is to be believed, lightning flashes carved the words on a stone tablet to the accompaniment of thunder. Moses merely carried the tablet down the hill. Had he brooded over them in order to add variety to the style or condense the statement from ten to eight commandments, or remember that while it is demanded that parents should be honoured, Gurus are not mentioned, he would have postponed publication, so to speak. He may have felt some dissatisfaction with the commandment "Thou shalt not envy thy neighbour's wife or his ass...." and decided that wife and ass should not be so closely associated in a divine declaration.

The poet who claims that he does not revise because he has no need to is modestly or otherwise claiming inspiration. It may not be divine but there is a flow of words in a proper sequence, creating the

form appropriate to it. Once the flow stops, there's nothing to be done.

A variation on that claim is: minor changes may be made, a few alterations here and there, with or without the help of critical friends, but the essential stream flows as it does. To change its direction or to reduce its quantity is sacrilege. This is a slightly more reasonable stance or seems to be, but the emphasis is still on the same belief or faith in inspired utterance.

At the other extreme is the idea of the poet as craftsman, practising the art of poetry, as Valery, for example, constantly insists on putting it, ordering and reordering words, phrases, rhythms and images within a consciously defined structure. That very structure may be changed, the theme may be transformed or metamorphosed if it does not become a very different one from the one with which the poet started. When this slow, laborious task is over, which makes revision a part of the creative process and not merely a later activity, the poem is *abandoned*. It is not finished, Valery says, because there is no limit to how much in theory it can be made better. To make it so much better, to the limits of possibility, one would have to be a better poet. The only recourse within the limitations of the poet's capacity at any given time is to hope for the next poem to be better.

I need only point out that Valery's assumption is of a poet unendingly surpassing himself as he moves from poem to poem until the last one before his death. There is no evidence for such poetic careers in the history of poetry and we may accept it only as a kind of ideal which Valery himself struggled to realise.

Obviously, there are a number of positions accepted as viable between these two extremes. I must warn, though, that if poet, critic or common reader imagines, as he is likely to, that the most sensible and viable position is exactly mid-way between the extremes, he is sure to become disillusioned. All mid-way wisdom, in life, as in literature, turns out to be impotent. The sexual image is necessary here, because a carefully calculated exercise of gentlemanly well-mannered 50% sexual power plus 50% craftsmanship is certain to prove a fraud.

I assume that there is such a thing as temperament which inclines the poet towards one or other mode of creation, and sometimes a combination of modes. As he comes to terms with it and understands its ways, he revises or does not revise, expects inspiration or finds "substitutes" for it. He may even work in every conceivable way at different times and find that this undogmatic functioning suits him best. I count myself one of those. I've never relied entirely on inspiration but feel no need to discount it altogether. What else is it but an inspired poem which comes when one is totally unprepared for it? I hasten to add that inspired poem in this sense is not necessarily a

good poem. The inspiration is a technical fact but has little or no validating force. The trouble with poets who experience this kind of inspiration is: they find it very difficult to believe that inspired poems may be bad poems. I, on the contrary, have to check the opposite inclination of being so suspicious of inspiration that I will not allow it to "dictate" a poem to me. I tell "inspiration" go to hell, but overlook the fact that it may actually do so, taking me along. Keeping an open mind on the subject seems a sound idea, until one discovers that an open mind may be as deadly as a closed mind. Creation is only possible, I say to myself despairingly, to a creative mind, which is nothing but a tautology. But at least the phrase 'creative mind' or spirit or consciousness can be described, confining the description here to this business of writing poetry.

Involvement in poetry, comprehensively, is of course the first condition, loving it, caring for its past, present and future, wanting very much to write it and to achieve some degree of excellence in the writing, thinking about its problems, assessing and judging it without inhibitions, trying to assimilate knowledge of it, and even becoming acquainted with its psychological signs and signals, this is the beginning, the most elementary basis of poetic practice. From this point one soon travels to the major questions about the nature of poetry and how it is written, recognising revision among them, related to the rest in a host of ways. It is compatible with every theory of the writing of poetry except, as I've pointed out already, the sacred or holy and unconditional faith in inspiration, divine or other. Even poetry as madness need not preclude revision for the sake of communicating madness, making the poem a more effective instrument of it. If poetry is sometimes controlled hysteria, the control may make the hysteria more convincing through even a few words and phrases being replaced by others. But which ones to be replaced by which? That is the crux of the problem of revision.

Just as whole poems may be inspired, in the sense of appearing unexpectedly and rapidly on the page, so may only a part or parts of a poem. The inspired parts may be filled out with the uninspired parts which appear equally unexpectedly and rapidly. The only way to distinguish between them is by reading them critically, objectively, with the detachment of the critic who has no vested interest in the inspiration of the poem. Revision means raising the uninspired sections, after recognising them as uninspired, to the level of the inspired bits or cutting them out. I once had an experience with the help of A.K. Ramanujan which taught me to cope with such poems. It was in 1967 in Chicago, where I was his guest, part of the available time preparing a few lectures and using the rest to revise a batch of poems

I had taken along. I was very pleased when Ramanujan picked up one of my poems from the batch on my table and said it was inspired. Immediately afterwards he shocked me by saying, "If you cut out the first nine lines and the last fourteen lines, this will be a good poem". I stammered something to the effect that since the poem had only 35 lines in it cutting out 23 would leave only 12. "Yes," he replied, "but those 12 lines are the inspired ones. If you want it to be a longer poem, you can revise some or all of the other 23." Eventually, I cut some and revised others, making it a poem of 19 lines. Later, I rewrote the hard core of the poem, restructuring the metrical phrases into vertical one-word lines, virtually the only poem of its kind I have written.

On another occasion, in mid-January 1964 in Leeds, I had to read a few of my poems at a party. That morning, when I made the selection, I was dissatisfied with it because there were not enough recent poems with an Indian ethos. I felt it was essential to pick recent ones and not those from my earlier books, and also to read some poems which would interest a non-Indian audience by their Indian themes. I decided to spend the day in my university room waiting, in Rilke's sense, for a poem, with only one proviso: it had to be Indian. My wife and I settled down in that room around 10 a.m.; by lunch time I had had no luck, by tea-time none either. Eventually, when my wife warned me that it was approaching 6 p.m. and that we would soon have to leave for the party, I wrote down in a fit of desperation and after making a joke about the words, "I remember" the joke being "I remember, I remember the house where I was born," then suddenly I wrote. "the night my mother was stung by a scorpion" and in as much time as it would take to make a copy of the poem, I had completed it. That night at the party I read it out. Later I sent a copy to a friend, anticipating his criticism by informing him that it was a first draft and I would in due course revise it. "Leave it alone" was his response. Other friends said the same, all of whom had won my affection by their ability to tear my poems to pieces. Eventually, when I was sending the poem for publication I made one small change: I allowed for extra space between the body of the poem and the last three lines. That was all the revision I made of "Night of the Scorpion".

Poets have always revised or not revised their poems, but making a fuss about it is undoubtedly a modern phenomenon. It is true that Poe had propounded in "The Philosophy of Composition" a view of the poet as calculating the effect of his poem on the reader before proceeding to use the devices which would produce that effect. But there is no proof that he actually wrote his poems in that way. Whereas there is now all the proof in the world of how modern poets write

and revise their poems from the first draft to the last. Preserving all the drafts may even be profitable to the poet, literally profitable. An American library has paid for such drafts and preserved them, so that researchers may note how a poem progresses (or degenerates) from the first to the last version. It made much sense for the later poems of Yeats to be preserved in such drafts. He often wrote and rewrote a single line on one sheet of paper after another until, with the sixteenth or twentieth sheet the line was finally acceptable to Yeats and he moved on to another lot of sheets, writing the second line twelve or fifteen times, or whatever.

However, the bogus soon drives out the genuine in such matters. In 1964, in London, it was suggested to me that I could make some money by submitting to a visiting American librarian a few of my poems with the earlier drafts, upto \$20 per poem plus drafts. I said that I was not in the habit of preserving the earlier drafts of any of my poems. "That's all right," said the person who had made the suggestion, "you can write those earlier drafts now, making changes in each as you go along." That was a kind of reverse creative method which I've never learnt. But I was assured that several of my English contemporaries had done it. "Poets are justified in making money so long as it is by creative means" one of them said to me, "even manufacturing earlier versions of a poem, requires imagination after all".

The point of that story is that revision can become a fetish and may eventually not remain the useful habit it should normally be. It may become a mechanical fashion-thing, to be learnt in creative writing classes and acquired with the diploma. Poets become toughened to it, they are willing to take all the pains in the world "to write well". They know what is needed to nourish talent, and they systematically seek it. What is "in" is not to be resisted but to be picked up as skilfully as possible. In the wonderfully witty and intelligent poem, "The Art of Poetry" by Kenneth Koch, which is included in a book entitled *The Art of Love*, the only statement I did not like is the following:

"As for surrealistic methods and techniques, they have become a natural part of writing"

Poets have been known to make realistic statements and then revise them so that they seem surrealistic. Their acceptance has become so widespread that no one cares to question the meaning or value of surrealistic verses. Faced with such poems, the academic says knowingly, "I suppose it's surrealistic" as if that solves all problems of the critical response. In revising poems, poets should guard against the danger of adding complexity like a varnish or altering a structure for

the sake of a more intricate rhythm, which may choke the meaning. A poem should never be revised to accommodate mannerisms but to eliminate such as have crept in. Clearly, then, revision is a double-edged weapon.

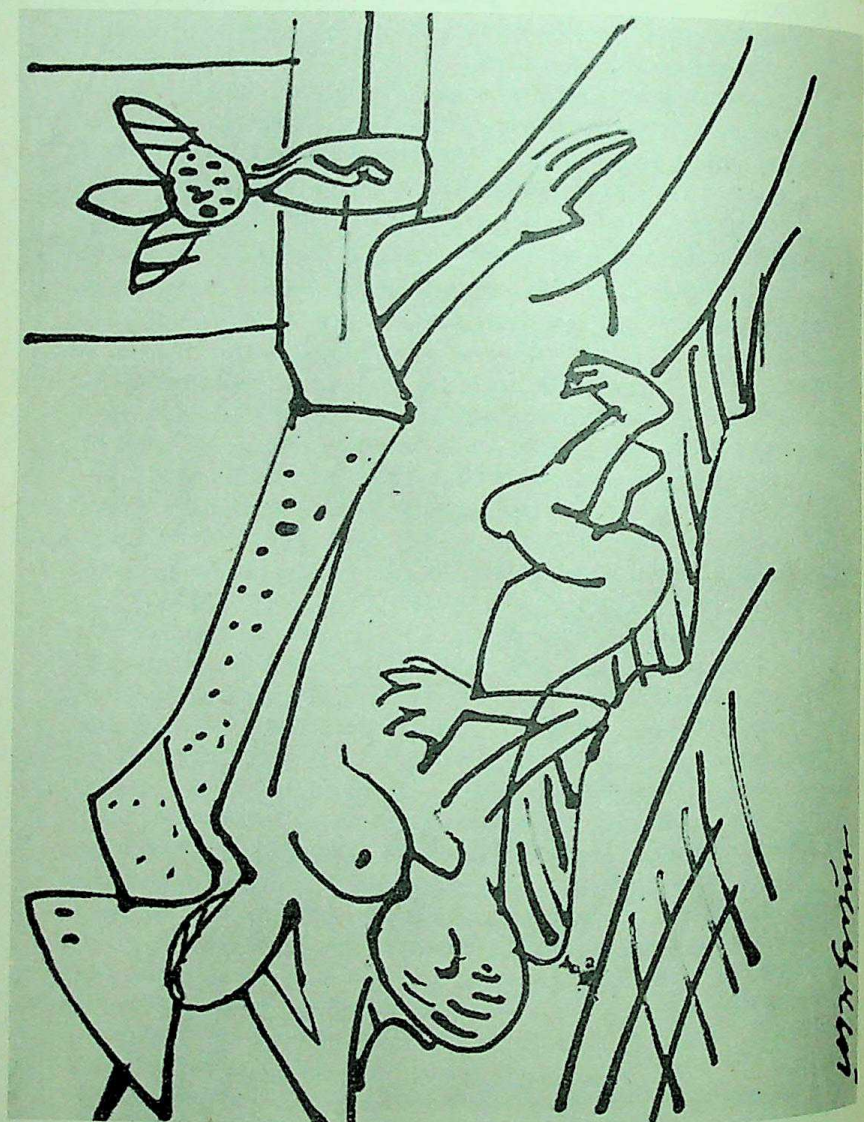
I don't know if it was always so, but people today who have any contact at all with poets and poetry are always interested in how a poem is written, what are the poet's normal and other habits, influences, procedures, special techniques. They hardly ever ask for comments on the poet's ideas or beliefs, his meaning in particular poems, his growth as a person through specific experiences. The questions about revision are almost always with reference to all that is known about the practice of Yeats and Dylan Thomas or Auden. A typical interview is Frederick Seidel's with Robert Lowell, reprinted in *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, edited by J. Scully, Collins, 1966. I shall summarise the questions in it of this kind, which are well over half of those asked by the interviewer. And the poet never says, well, it doesn't make any difference to the poems whether I wrote them first in one metre and then in another, or first in prose and then verse. Mr. Seidel's questions are about influences, early draft, of a well-known poem, poems published in contrast to rejected poems, the source of certain stanza forms, the use of couplets, the addition of syllables for the sake of clarity where this is done as claimed by the poet, how much 'working/over' certain poems needed, how and why parts of old poems are rewritten and put into new ones, the inevitable question, "Do you revise a great deal?" which is virtually superfluous at that late stage in the interview, and Lowell's inevitable answer which is also superfluous, "Endlessly". In addition to the point I've mentioned, Lowell informs his readers through the interviewer that it seems to him "We've gotten in a sort of Alexandrian age" which means the age in which literary and intellectual life is over-ingenious, pointlessly technical to the point of being decadent. Lowell says, "Poets of my generation and particularly younger ones have gotten terribly proficient at these forms. They write a very musical difficult poem with tremendous skill, perhaps there's never been such skill. Yet the writing seems divorced from culture somehow. It's become too much something specialised that can't handle much experience. It's craft, purely a craft, and there must be some breakthrough back into life."

I wouldn't like to put all the blame for that development on the simple idea of revision, even when it acquires a highly exaggerated importance. But there is something highly outrageous in this business of writing out a possible poem first as a passage of prose and then putting it into a fixed metrical form, with rhymes after which the rhymes are removed and the metres broken for the sake of a free

feeling in the form. It seems to me an experienced poet could move less deviously towards his final goal, and all this talk about how deviously he did it impresses generations of poets to do it with equal or greater deviousness. No wonder the goal is not what they had in mind but the Alexandrian age, with life and culture out of the poem!

It would of course be disastrous if the reaction were in favour of spontaneous poetry, free from any formal discipline, a purely arbitrary outflow that is never checked for the sake of art but allowed to continue in the name of emotion. I am reminded of one Indian-English poet who claims that she doesn't even read other poets any more because she doesn't want to be influenced by them. That way lies the death of poetry as an art.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*.



The Decolonized Muse

Keki N. Daruwalla

We are all trapped in History. The Europeans came to trade, hung on to fight, intrigue and conquer, and stayed on to instruct. Their colonies became vast markets for their textiles and their language. Conversions followed, to another way of life and on occasions to Christianity. When they went back they left their language behind, and half-castes. In an alien land, language, itself turns brown and half-caste.

English was introduced in India with commercial objectives in view. What was achieved was something much greater in dimensions. Colonial history shows that language can be as domineering as any occupational army. It supplants myths, whole iconographies, world-view, ideology. It ushers in its own symbols and its own values. An armada of new texts sails in. Old dogmas and bigotries are swept away and exchanged for new ones.

You cannot choose your generation, your parents or your language, even a foreign one at times. If your father teaches English and you have three thousand books in the house, all in the same language, you have precious few options. To become fully conscious of writing in the language of one's erstwhile colonial rulers, one must cross various thresholds of realization. A child thinks through language and feels through experience. One must confine himself to one's own experience. The first school I entered was called Sacred Hearts. But World War II was raging, the Italian fathers next door were under house arrest, and even a string or two of barbed wire had sprung up around the school. Not the right sort of atmosphere for a growing boy, my father thought. So I got transplanted to an Arya School, quite a different kettle of fish, really. Many of the boys came from a different social stratum. Urdu, Hindi, Sanskrit were given as much importance as English, and rightly so. The pronunciation of the school masters and the students bordered on the atrocious. My fluency in English was greeted with derisive laughter. Just because the grammar was correct and the diction not too awful, one became an object of mockery.

The next threshold was crossed when one encountered boys from public schools. These were situated in the mountain sanctuaries of Murree and Simla and Nainital. The boys wore blue blazers and school neckties. Their speech was more clipped, their smiles more condescending. They even spoke their *Hindusthani* in an anglicised accent. They could hardly pronounce the names of the towns they lived in. Nainithaal, as it is pronounced in *Hindusthani*, got twisted to 'Nainitoll'. And they used slang. It was old slang of course, shipped some three decades ago which had got lost on the seas, then lay rotting on the docks like dry fish, till it was despatched by steam rail and mule back to those public schools in the mountains. But the fact is that they used slang and if you did not catch on to a phrase, you were held in contempt.

And then came my first conversation with an Englishman. He had to repeat himself three times to make himself understood. What an exotic accent, I thought. Why couldn't the fellow speak English as she ought to be spoke?

No other trauma intervened for the next fifteen years or so. Then, as one started publishing poetry in English, critics shook their heads in disapproval. Yes, fiction, essays, articles, even pornography one could write in English, they said [though nothing like Punjabi for robust abuse]. But poetry was another cup of tea. You could write it only in a language you had imbibed with mother's milk. This line of argument gave rise to, what I chose to call, The Lactatory School of Literary Criticism. Another august body called the Royal School of Dreamy Critics asked me if I dreamt in English. If I did not, I should not be writing poetry in English. The trouble was I dreamt in images and not language. My dreams were like silent movies. When once in a while, they did turn into Talkies, they were like me, multi-lingual.

Exiles come to alien shores and write in the language of their adopted country. Joseph Conrad, Koestler, Nabakov are examples. An Indian writing poetry in English was an exile in his own country.

The handicaps were all too apparent. One is not merely speaking of an exclusive readership and that the Indian language writer has a wider audience. But isn't poetry usually restricted to a class with a certain educational background? It could be said that 7000 miles and quite a few years separated an Indian writer from the 'living speech' of the language. But didn't millions speak English in India? Wasn't it at least the second language of most educated Indians? It was the language of the bank and the stock exchange, of the Parliament, the Secretariat and the law courts. The writer was perfectly at home with it. What I was referring to were the difficulties in writing poetry itself.

You stuck to the straight and narrow path of textual English. You cut out linguistic heroics and hesitated in taking liberties with the language. It was tough enough mastering [if that's the word] the idiom. To now start fragmenting it, chopping up the grammar and entering the slippery realm of the disjunctive seemed an unthinkable indulgence. Sound, as poets know, is vital to poetry. At times I hesitated in giving a full phonetic charge to my verse unless the meaning was crystal clear and each line as a unit made sense.

Yet, instinctively one knew what to exclude: words like 'deliverance' and 'renunciation', expressions like 'the wondrous mysteries of the divine' 'the oneness of Brahma', 'the stream of life' the self [both the small guy starting with an 's' in the lower case and the big fellow with the capital 'S']; all talk of *moksha* (liberation) and *maya* (appearance); all references to infinity and eternity and expressions like 'the womb of the void' or 'the void of the womb' [have it anyway you please]. I avoided them like the plague. Not once, as far as I recollect, have I talked of the 'soul' in a poem. It was by a conscious act of will. The stranglehold over the soul, this monopoly over the spiritual enjoyed both by the earlier well-meaning Indian savants who passed off as philosophers, and the present batch of crooks who masquerade as godmen, is one of the intellectual scandals of this century.

Instinctively one made language subservient to content. Those who think that the form *is* the poem would not take kindly to this. Literature concerns itself with the world of the spirit and the flesh as we know it, with objective reality, passions, feelings and consciousness, the past and memories. Language after all is just one of the few dimensions that go to make literature what it is. So it was good literary strategy to give more weight to content. All language and literature are in some way a translation: you render reality [dreams, perceptions, memories, the physical world] into words. Surely this reality is important, and a case can be made out for giving it primacy over language.

How would I define insight or truth? That which in any other tongue would have gone as swiftly to the heart.

Looking back I find that the compulsion to mark out an identity for myself must have been very strong. Since one was writing in English it should be all the more evident that it was an Indian writing. Just bringing an Indian sensibility to bear on a theme was not enough. The poem had to be securely fastened to an Indian setting; should reek of freshly upturned earth under a monsoon downpour. With hindsight, that is the only way I can explain my almost fierce commitment to place, site, landscape. In my very first book, *Under Orion*, one entire section was devoted to life in the marshlands. Another book dealt with the purificatory myth of the river Ganga.

At the same time one could not close one's eyes to the filth at the ghats of Benares and the seeming chaos, the miasma of funeral pyres going up in flames a few yards from unconcerned pilgrims bathing in the river, offering obeisance to the rising sun. I accepted the notion that its swirling waters cleansed one of his sins. But I could not shut my eyes to what was happening in front of me. This is where we come back to language. For languages erect their own outposts of sensibility; not that you can easily marshal arguments to support that kind of a nebulous statement. Nor had it anything to do with a colonial hangover. One saw squalor and chaos for what they were. They registered themselves on the cornea. No alibis are needed here.

In university one had been brought up on a diet of Shelley and Keats. When you left the campus you faced harsh reality around you—drought, poverty and communal riots. One needed a harsh language, words with a saw-edge, words which rasped and got into you like the shards of a broken bottle. Slowly, almost unconsciously the poems developed a vocabulary and a soundscape of their own.

The question of *patois* comes up often, of the Indian contribution to the English language. Some of these experiments have been very successful e.g. Desani's *Mad Hatter* or Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, both recognised as minor classics today. Novels are one thing, verse another. We have had no such triumphs in poetry. Admitted that the Indian has his own way with English syntax, but it is in no way comparable to the Carribean patois. The Indian way of speaking English is to mix the languages—half a sentence in English and the other tattered half in Hindi or Marathi or Bengali. Writing in that manner could bring on numerous problems. PIDGIN is fine but a half-Hindi-half-English amalgam becomes impractical.

Finally, while the poet endeavours to hone the language to his purpose, language also has a way with his poetry. If you have wielded an oriental scimitar all your life, you are used to whirling it about, making fearful whistling arcs in the air and generally slashing around. But give the same man a straight-bladed Roman sword and wily nily, given some time, he will learn to thrust and stab.

The Tamil Scene

Ashokamitran

The earliest extant Tamil literary work is a creation titled *Tolkappiyam*, meaning the ancient classic or the ancient epic. It is not a classic or an epic in the sense in which the term is used but is a grammar of life and letters. It is marked by great clarity and precision of terms and expression. It cannot be a wild guess that if a work like *Tolkappiyam* were possible some eighteen or twenty centuries ago, there must have been considerable literary activity long before, leading to definitions of forms and genres. There has been a tradition of commentary for Tamil literary works right from the early times and some of the commentaries and commentators are as great and important as the original works and their creators. There are accounts of literary assemblies in the past and there are accounts of celebrated poets like Kamban and Tiruvalluvar having had to present their creations before these assemblies at various places in Tamil Nadu before their works were accorded sanction as literary works by the assemblies. The confrontation of the Saivite savants, the Nayanars, with Jain groups in the seventh century A.D. was also in the nature of a literary debate and challenge and sometimes, the test was with such agencies as fire and floodwaters. The rivalry between two important Tamil poets, Ottakkoothar and Pugazhendi, always manifested as criticism of one's work by the other, or an assessment of their works by a third person, a princess in one such instance. A little more than a hundred years ago, there was a deeply pious man by name Ramalingam in a place called Vadalur near Chidambaram and the body of poems he created, he called 'Thiru-Arutpa', meaning holy or divine verses of revelation. This was challenged by another scholar and a great devotee in his own right, Arumuga Navalar. For Arumuga Navalar, the verses of Ramalingam of Vadalur were neither divine nor even poetry and he pointed out what he considered flaws of content and expression. Actually Navalar's criticism of Ramalingam's verses was even taken to a court of law. There are folk legends in Tamil of a highly gifted princess who was to be won over by a suitor only through the excellence

of his poetry. The suitor lost his life when the princess analysed his poem and pointed out the flaws.

All this indicates not only a certain continuity of literary activity in the language but also a continuing effort to sort out and classify the good and the not-so-good creations; effort to interpret and elaborate the poets' words; effort to lay down criteria for assessment of literary works. Ramalingam of Vadalur is revered by the Tamils as a saint and mystic who possessed supranormal powers attained through a vision of the divine as supreme light. He is supposed to have vanished in thin air thus ending his mortal life and if one dared to challenge such a venerated person he must be a truly evil agent but actually Arumuga Navalar was himself a great devotee of Shiva. It was his zealous devotion to Shiva as well as his zealous attachment to Tamil that made him so vehement towards Ramalingam of Vadalur for what he thought were offences to both the Lord and the language. Arumuga Navalar translated the Bible for Protestants and his close association with them gave him the idea that if his faith, Saivism, should flourish and prosper, the abstruse religious works should be made accessible to common people in a language well within their reach of understanding. He wrote primers for students of Tamil language and religion and he is credited to have adopted the sounds of sha, sa ha and jha as part of Tamil alphabet.

Arumuga Navalar was a Tamil from Sri Lanka, so was V. Kanakasabhai Pillai who would be called an amateur in a gathering of pundits and critics. He was an assistant in the Post and Telegraphs Department but with the material he could gather with his resources he wrote in English a rather extraordinary book titled *The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago*. The book is in the nature of a general discussion of Tamil literature and summaries of the epics.

A contemporary of Kanakasabhai Pillai in the late 19th century was Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Aiyer. He collected several 'lost' scripts and texts from various sources through years of search and probing and published them in faithful and comprehensive editions. His is probably the most lucid, informative and honest autobiography available in Tamil. From that and also from the book-length, accounts he wrote of his revered teachers Thyagaraja Chettiar and Meenakshisundaram Pillai, as also a number of his literary essays, one gets an intimate and extensive picture of the literary scene of his day—it was mostly a world of scholars for him—and one is struck by the stimulating critical climate.

A somewhat modernistic approach to literary criticism, even though the subjects of criticism were the age-old classics came to Tamil through V.V.S. Iyer, T.K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar and S.

Vaiyapuri Pillai. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar was one of the most vocal critics of interpolation in classics. It needed great courage to point out and discard a number of verses from Kamban's *Ramayanam* as interpolations when they had been established firmly in the text and even given religious sanction. Chidambaranatha Mudaliar had an expansive personality; he was an infectious aesthete with the result, much of his contribution to Tamil criticism passed off with minor protests but Vaiyapuri Pillai brought upon himself the displeasure of the purists because when he began to date the great Tamil works in a scientific manner, he could not make them ancient enough for the approval of the chauvinists. And it was from the atmosphere created by the interaction between Vaiyapuri Pillai and the Tamil establishment grew the hostility of Tamil purists for application of modern criteria to literary assessment.

From 1920 onwards, Tamil society was undergoing a transformation in several aspects of life. It witnessed Subrahmanya Bharati, the new patriotic spirit infused by Mahatma Gandhi, with growing realisation of the heritage of the land and the language, resentment of the overlordship of aliens and alien languages, an awakening to the equality of all men and the consequent reaction to the classes deriving benefit out of exploitation. This was also the time when prose was coming into its own as a medium of creative self-expression. As in the case of most Indian languages, the first practitioners of Tamil prose were English educated. With the rise of periodical publication, writing and literature became concerns of a larger section of people, not necessarily scholars and pundits. Verse was still the domain of the Tamil erudites but not so the Short Story and the Novel. As a matter of fact, the traditional Tamil scholar felt great reluctance to entertain the new prose forms as literature which is understandable. The great Alvars and Nayanars, Kamban and Tiruvalluvar, all the great poets of Tamil in the passage of centuries right down to Ramalingam of Vadalur and Arumuga Navalar of Jaffna had attained a saintly status. To equate them with contemporary writers, even in the realm of writing might well appear sacrilegious. Traditional Tamil has precise prescription for the choice of characters and protagonists. New Tamil writing had to draw its characters from the life around and naturally they couldn't be as exalted as those of the classics.

Ask any educated Tamil today, 'Is there a climate of criticism in Tamil literature?'—nine out of ten, would answer, 'no'. With such a lot of critical work done in the past and a continuous literary activity, that such a notion should prevail is significant. And that at a time when there is an enthusiastic scholar or two in every college working on a 'history of Tamil literature'. There is now a large number of

these histories. There is a lot of critical activity in the academic world and Tamil probably is the only Indian language which wins the Sahitya Akademi award every other year for an academic writing of 'literary criticism'.

Then why this feeling of inadequacy about literary criticism?

Firstly, much of the critical writing produced doesn't contain insights and analyses demanding attention. There could be some sociological causes also. For all the noble sentiments expressed in traditional Tamil, the democratic processes of the 20th century could not adequately be accommodated within the realm of traditional Tamil studies. Early in the century, the language of Tamil began to acquire shades of politics. (In such a climate, consideration of Sanskrit poetics for critical criteria in Tamil could not flourish.) This was a contradiction for, what was preferred were images and symbols of medieval Tamil culture while society as a whole was gravitating towards human rights in the light of 20th century enlightenment. Very simple things such as attempting to determine the period of different classics led to serious protests from the linguistic chauvinists so as to call the researcher 'Enemy of Tamil'. It was in such an atmosphere that origins of modern literary criticism were trying to get a foothold and not a little of it is due to the efforts of one person by name Ka Naa Subramanian.

Ka Naa Subramanian began writing in the nineteen thirties. Soon after graduation, he shaped himself to be just a writer and he wrote both in English and Tamil. As was natural in those times, his first inspirations included a number of Western masters. But what he wrote was very Indian, very Tamil middle-class Brahmin experiences but in a form he owed to the Western masters. He got editorial assignments early and that started off his becoming an essayist also. He very rarely strayed away from matters literary and he was the first to come out with literary assessments of his contemporaries. As though to orient readers as to what was good writing and what was not, also a means to educate them as to how to approach a literary work, he wrote a number of essays on several Western authors and their works. But his concern was Tamil writing and so he wrote about Tamil writers as well. He was the first in Tamil literary circles to assert that a popular work need not necessarily be a literary work. It required great courage to say this, for the Tamil establishment had somewhat identified itself with the popular media. (To a great extent, that is the situation today.) Ka Naa Subramanian ran quite a few literary reviews and was associated with some of his contemporaries like C.S. Chellappa, for example, and still continues to write on Tamil writing. It is sad that the enormous body of writing he has done on Tamil writing is yet to be collected in book form. He is the one Tamil

critic who has consistently watched the writings of his times and commented upon them and so in his essays one can see the changes that Tamil writing is passing through: the idealism and romanticism of the forties, the experience of the fifties, and the despair and disillusionment of the sixties and seventies. But for Ka Naa Subramanian, a good number of good writers would not have been noticed and given the attention they get today. Those writers are R. Shanmugasundaram (who did very little magazine writing), Mowni, Alagiriswamy and Neela Padmanabhan. Ka Naa Subramanian was also the first to pick out Sundara Ramaswamy and Jayakanthan early in their careers and thus contribute to their flowering into major writers in the fifties. Ka Naa Subramanian did not stop with merely commenting on the writers. He translated some of their works into English and took them and Tamil writing to a larger readership.

Critics with leftist ideologies began to make a mark in the fifties. But it was not until 1968 when Prof. K. Kailasapathy of Sri Lanka published his book on the Tamil novel when some kind of battle lines were drawn. Kailasapathy's book is an important work and he also exposed the hollowness of the popular writing but he was somewhat partisan when it came to writers who declared themselves to be progressives. The fifties and sixties saw a lot of debates between the progressives and the non-progressives. There was some genuine literary criticism but a lot of polemical bombast too. All this criticism and polemics circulated only among a small circle of editors and writers. Even today, though one may say that the number of Tamils involved with serious writing has increased, readership for popular writing has multiplied manifold.

The academic world has also begun to pay attention to literary criticism of serious Tamil writing. In October 1982, the Tamil University of Thanjavur conducted a seminar on Tamil poetry and there was a mixed representation of the traditional and the non-traditional, the popular and the serious. But even in such assemblies, one can find that popular success is a more emphatic criterion than the intrinsic literary worth of the writing.

In these fifty years, there have been many 'little' magazines carrying literary criticism and it is probably the work of some of these magazines that has been most influential. It is a sign of coming of age that even publications of definite leftist origins or leanings do not any longer take extreme stances as did the pioneers of the movement. Works of all serious writers are examined and discussed, unlike as in the past when whole set of writers and their creations were ignored. But their preoccupation is still more on the content and that certainly handicaps the assessment of literary works in their totality. A Marxist scholar,

Vaanaamaamalai of Tirunelveli, published a quarterly devoted to literary and sociological discussion and research. On behalf of the quarterly, periodical meetings—seminars—were held where papers on a specific author and his works were read and discussed. True, it was content-oriented but the quarterly's work was exhaustive and the quarterly is now a very dependable source material for further study and research of many a writer.

If one made a list of critics of current Tamil writing, it would run thus. M. Arunachalam working on a monumental multi-volume history of Tamil Literature, Ka Naa Subramanian, C.S. Chellappa, K. Kailasapathy, Sivathambi, Senthilnathan, Thi Ka Sivasankaran, Vallikkannan, M. Ramalingam, Kanakasabhapathy, Nakulan, Jesudasan, Bala Palaiswamy (Gnani of Coimbatore), and S. Krishnan.

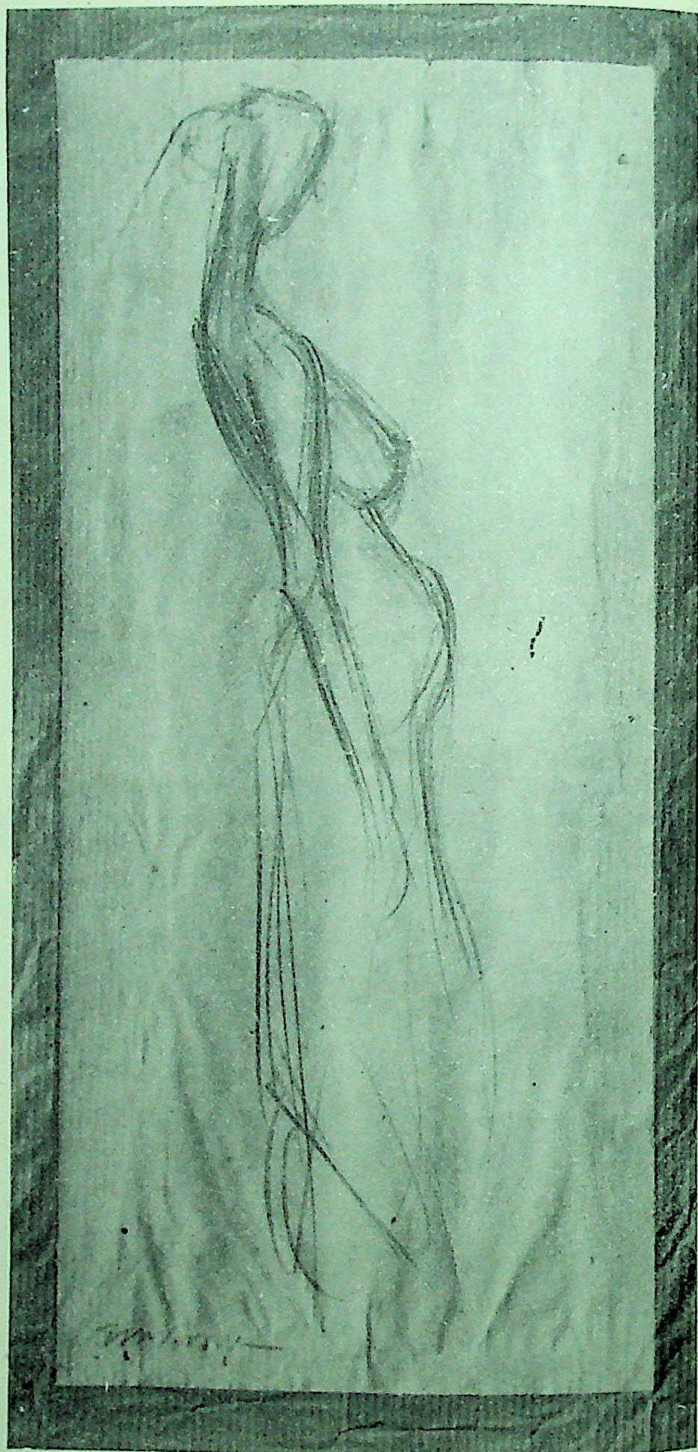
Has literary criticism given rise to new readers for serious writing? Has it fashioned any writer or turned an existing writer into a better one? What has been the interaction between the few critics and the writers? Ka Naa Subramanian and C.S. Chellappa more or less gave up creative writing when they took to literary criticism. A few critics have been successful in creating a cult following and this has led to fierce in-fighting and character assassination. But all this extends only over a few dozen people. Though belonging to opposite and warring camps, both Ka Naa Subramanian and Kailasapathy have been very severe critics of popular writers like Kalki and Akhilan but these writers are as popular as ever and have been given official recognition like the Sahitya Akademi Award and Gnana Pith Award. Clearly the impact of the critic on the general reading public as also on the total consciousness of the Tamil people does not seem to be significant.

They say the sun cannot dawn on Madras without *The Hindu*—such is the prestige of the daily newspaper. *The Hindu* published a few book notices and reviews on every Tuesday. Going through some issues at a stretch one would get the feeling that the most worthwhile books published in Tamil language are Tamil renderings of religious texts and potboiler fiction. Even *The Hindu* has to nod to the popular, commercial circuit when it comes to books. Maybe one can't blame. Once a popular magazine published a blistering attack on me for a book of mine. Far from feeling depressed by it, a good number of my own literary friends congratulated me because the magazine published my photograph along with the attack. For them, to be exposed to the vast number of readers of the popular commercial circuit, though in the negative light, was something desirable.

One last thing about Tamil literary criticism and Sanskrit. For reasons well-known to people of this region, Sanskrit is not in favour among the influential of the Tamil scholars of the establishment, both

as a language and as a literary influence and regulator. While it should be possible to adopt certain Sanskrit terms in the Tamil vocabulary for critical purposes, it is a little difficult to assert the usefulness of employing the concepts of the Sanskrit tradition to the vastly changed sociological scene of Tamil today from which must spring authentic creative expression. As a matter of fact, the Tamil literary tradition, which is also sufficiently ancient, is itself found to be uncomfortably matched criteria for the 20th century Tamil writing.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*.



A Climate in The Making

Ayyappa Paniker

The earliest piece of literary criticism relating to the literature of Kerala is the 14th Century work *Lilatilakam*, the manuscript of which was unearthed and published for the first time in 1916. The work is mostly written in Sanskrit, but the examples are by and large from Manipravalam (a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam) and occasionally from pure Malayalam. It is an elaborate study of the language and literature of Manipravalam and consists of eight sections. The first three sections are on the language and deal with the distinctive features of Manipravalam, the origins of Malayalam, and the rules of sandhi. The fourth section deals with *Kavyadoshas*; the fifth with *gunas*; the sixth with the *sabda-alankāras*, the seventh with *artha-alankāras*, and the last with *rasas*. The sound (words) of Manipravalam (composed of Sanskrit and Malayalam) are described as 'body' while the *rasas* are referred to as 'soul'. It is believed that this conforms to the pattern in which the earliest writings of this kind were written in Kannada and Telugu too. The anonymous author of *Lilatilakam* seems to have been a scholar familiar with several languages like Prakrit, Telugu and Kannada in addition to Sanskrit and Malayalam. He appears in the work as a considerable linguist and aesthetic theoretician. He identified 20 Kavyadoshas in section IV (Doshalokanam) and 4 *gunas* in section V (Gunaniroopanam). In section VI, he makes a distinction between 3 kinds of pun: the *uttama*, *madhyama* and *adhama* forms of *slesha*. Section VII discusses 27 figures of speech and section VIII attempts an analysis of *vyangyam*, *vastu* and *alankāra* as sources of *rasa* and adds *santa* as the ninth *rasa*. *Vira* is said to be dominant among the *rasas* like Indra among the *devas*, while *srngara* is even more important like Bhagavan Pundarikaksha. A few other words like *Alankāra samkshepam* followed *Lilatilakam*, but like their fore-runner they were clearly derived from the Sanskrit originals. They have however a limited value as applied literary criticism in so far as they help to bring out or illustrate the poetics of Manipravala literature.

There were in fact a few creative works even prior to *Lilatilakam*

which were written in a purer form of Malayalam with no abject surrender to the language and aesthetics of Sanskrit. *Ramacharitham*, a long narrative poem in 1814 verses, is perhaps the earliest of these *pattu kavyas*, followed in later centuries by the works of the Niranam poets, Poonthanam Nambudiri and Thunchathu Ezhuthachan. But it is a pity that till today no serious attempt has been made by any critic in the language to set up a theory of Malayalam poetics based on these creative works in the language. This has resulted in heavy dependence on the part of Malayalam critics on foreign models of criticism. Academic interest in criticism in modern times has seldom gone beyond the requirements of the classroom, and this has resulted in a kind of intellectual stagnation. There have been excellent commentaries of Sanskrit works like those of Raghavananda. The poetics of the *pattu kavyas*, however, contains elements which cannot be fully explained by the critical principles derived from Sanskrit. *Ramacharitham*, *Krishnagatha*, *Adyatma Ramayanam* and *Sree Maha Bharatam* are long narrative poems in the local tradition which take the place of the mahakavya of Sanskrit. The Sanskrit mahakavya tradition did not take deep root in Malayalam. The central tradition in Malayalam poetry is derived from the anthologies of the Sangham age and the *pattu kavyas* of the 12th to the 16th centuries. The *Kilipaattu* of Ezhuthachan and Poonthanam are based on a poetics different from that of the mahakavyas and the Champu Kavyas derived from Sanskrit. It appears that until the nineteenth century, there was no attempt at plain translation of the Sanskrit classics. Kalidasa's *Sakuntalam* was translated for the first time around 1880 and since then dozens of times. But there had been imitations, adaptations and free interpretative renderings and retellings in earlier times. The several versions of Ramayana in Malayalam (*Ramacharitham*, *Ramakathappattu*, *Kannassa Ramayanam*, *Adhyatma Ramayanam Kilippattu*, etc.) are interpretive recreations rather than translations. The Bhakti movement during the Middle Ages helped not only the process of translation from Sanskrit into regional languages, but also the application of the regional poetics to the retelling of national epics. It is my belief that in Kerala, the Dravidianization of Aryan mythology facilitated the localization of the poetics that appears to operate in these great works. But this has not so far attracted the attention of our critics. The poetics that underlies the best works in Malayalam has seldom been studied independently of the Sanskrit tradition. A few attempts in recent times have been made to illustrate the principles of *rasa*, *dhvani*, *vākrokti* etc., with examples from the works of Malayalam writers. A.R. Rajaraja Varma's *Bhashabhooshanam* and Dr. P.K. Narayana Pillai's *Kairalidhvani* are of this type. These do not however evolve a new

poetics from the study of our own classics but try to see them as mere illustrations of the findings of Sanskrit *ālankarikas*.

The main reasons perhaps for this lacuna in Malayalam literary criticism are two. One of them is that most of the old critics were learned scholars in Sanskrit and they never cared to take seriously anything that could be called Dravidian poetics. Even those who were familiar with early Dravidian works, including the contributions of Kerala writers to Sangham literature, did not go any further than merely describing or summarising the contents of the Dravidian classics. The second reason is that modern literary criticism in Malayalam came into being as a result of the Western impact. The growth of prose, the starting of the newspapers, the spread of English education, and increasing familiarity with Western literary models led to the growth of literary criticism in Malayalam as an offshoot of literary journalism. The Sanskritists used criticism as a form of interpretation according to the time-honoured rules of an ancient tradition, while Westernized writers, like C.P. Achyutha Menon, thought of it as evaluations of individual works of authors, which appeared in journals as articles or book reviews. The two trends appear combined in some of the critical writings of A.R. Rajaraja Varma (1863–1918), P.K. Narayana Pillai (known as Sahityapanchananan, 1878–1937), Kesari A. Balakrishna Pillai (1889–1960) and Joseph Mundassery (1901–1977). While A.R. Rajaraja Varma wrote *Bhashabhooshanam* in the Sanskritist tradition, his comments of Kumaran Asan's attempts to use new imagery and to move away from a moribund tradition reveal the influence of the West. He also welcomed the attempt to reject the traditional rhyme on the second syllable and the use of poetical conceits like those involving the lotus and the sun or the water lily and the moon. Rajaraja Varma's disciple, Sahityapanchananan tried to interpret to the readers of his generation the classics of Malayalam poetry: Cherusseri, Ezhuthachan and Kunchan Nambiar. He is one of the first of our critics to attempt a proper fusion of the Indian and Western tenets of criticism. His 'judicial' criticism enabled the readers to have a set of standards of literary evaluation. He never minced his words. Being a judge by profession, he must have found it easy to examine the arguments for and against with a desire to arrive at the truth without being swayed by unseemly passion or prejudice. For instance, in the preface he wrote in English to his treatise on Kunchan Nambiar (1906), he says:

The critical portion of the book, I fear, will fail to win the approbation of the professional reviewers and journalistic knights-errant, our arch-benefactors, who though always

striving and vying with each other, by the congenial exercise of frothy vituperation, to bring down to this benighted land of ours—benighted as mirrored in their benighted brains—do me occasionally the service of amusing me by their fits of critical head-ache brought on by ineradicable envy. The indulgent reader will find that in spite of all the critical ploughing up of our literary field, one of the chief features, if not the chief feature, of Nambiar our people's poet—I mean his satirical aspect—had not hitherto been brought to prominence. In this as well as a few other points, if the student of literature concedes that I may legitimately put forth a modest claim for originality, I think I shall be sufficiently rewarded,

This claim for originality is in itself a remarkable new thing in Indian criticism. The traditionalists have always made us feel that everything that could possibly be said on anything has already been said by the old masters. Sahityapanchananan thus deviates from the time-honoured practice by not only daring to do new things but also by claiming originality. In the preface (written in English) to his lectures (1930) on Tunchathu Ezhuthachan delivered in Madras, he justifies his attempt to re-interpret the classics.

The reason of the likely neglect of the old masters, according to one view, is that unless we are introduced to them by men of our own time, we may not recognize them. Every age requires the past to be interpreted to it in terms of its own ideas. In the interests of the continuity of letters no great author of the past should sink into a mere *magni nominis umbra* (the shadow of a great name).

The task of furbishing 'the reputation of our old authors' was neatly accomplished by Sahityapanchananan. Setting forth his critical method, he says in the same preface:

The attempt has been to lay bare the main veins to work the mine, but the veins themselves are far from being worked out. But in that attempt, with the utmost reverence to the great master, I have not hesitated to disentangle the lustrous from the opaque ingredients of the ore. I fear I have run counter to accepted notions in this respect, but the demands of critical honesty were too strong to be resisted. It is not safe to rest the reputations of an author like Ezhuthachan on false foundations. It is risky, and posterity will call us to account for false estimates. There is no dearth of firm foundations for his fame, and in view of such, I fail to see why it should indiscriminately be rested upon insecure bases as well.

Sahityapanchananan is perhaps our first writer to fully accept the responsibilities and duties of a literary critic. In his treatises, he never flinched from these responsibilities. The closeness of his logic, the care with which he sifts evidence, the exactitude of his expression, and the clarity of his thought: all mark him out to be a major critic in the language. While discussing the basis of Ezhuthachan's greatness as a poet, he takes up the question of what makes for great poetry:

At the present time when belief in God and atheism are engaged in a fist-fight, it may be doubted whether works based on the philosophy of bhaktiyoga may command any attention. If poetry is an art and art is appreciated, then poetry will not be rejected just because the theme is bhakti. Dante and Milton are great poets who have written poems on philosophical themes. They used to live and operate in the states of mind that form the basis of their utterances. Poetry in truth is a reflection closely connected with the poet's life. The words of a poet are utterances marked by emotional intensity. The poetic quality of works composed by the recollection in tranquillity of emotional experiences roused by thoughts cannot be denied. But mere compositions on philosophical doctrines in the form of essays will not qualify for poetry 'The Essay on Man' by the English poet Pope is one like that. [trans]

Incidentally, by writing these concentrated studies on Kerala's master-poets, Sahityapanchananan not only highlighted the central tradition of Malayalam poetry, but also subtly contributed to the increasing popularity of Dravidian metres which had been invariably used by these older poets in preference to Sanskrit quatrains.

The period that followed is dominated by A. Balakrishna Pillai, Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai, Kuttikrishna Marar and M.P. Paul. All of them except Marar were deeply influenced by Western literary and philosophical thought. Balakrishna Pillai and Paul were instrumental in popularising the close study and evaluation of prose fiction. The novel and the short story were new forms of creative expression and traditional Indian criticism had very little to say directly on prose narratology. Balakrishna Pillai introduced new forms of fiction to younger writers like Kesava Dev and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. He also encouraged the realistic trends in drama by translating Ibsen. He wrote critical essays on new novels and thereby provided a model for fiction criticism. He was often obsessed with new movements and trends and schools. He wrote at length on them and was liberal to a fault in encouraging young writers trying out new forms. Freudian

and Jungian psychology, Marxian economics, various movements like Naturalism, Realism, Expressionism and Surrealism: all these figure prominently in Balakrishna Pillai's critical writings. M.P. Paul's books on *The Novel* and *The Short Story* were also timely productions. The sociological and historical dimensions, which have no prominence in traditional Indian criticism, were now added to widen the Malayalam critic's perspective. Literary works, especially in prose, came to be assessed not in terms of *rasa* and *dhvani*, but in terms of the depiction of social reality or of autobiographical revelation. Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai started out as a traditionalist invoking the Vedic values and tenets, but soon became the mouthpiece of socialist and rationalist thought. In his criticism he was greatly concerned with the ideological content of literary works.

But it was Kuttikrishna Marar, brought up on the purely native Sanskrit tradition, that served as a link between the past and the present. He was not easily swayed by the new-fangled ideas from the West. But he had a dynamic mind. He subjected Ramayana and Mahabharata and the works of Kalidasa to close scrutiny and provided fresh and meaningful interpretations. Like Sahityapanchananan of the earlier decades, Marar too was analytical and subtle, and was able to make the Sanskrit classics relevant to our own times and their moral tangles. His essays in *Rajankanam* and *Kala Jeevitam Thanné* are a revelation of the inner springs of literary creation.

In the works of Joseph Mundassery, we find the culmination of the trends that were seen earlier in the writings of A. Balakrishna Pillai, Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai and M.P. Paul. While he was a champion of the Progressive Movement all his life, he had to fight his fight against the Socialist realists among the Communists to defend his view that a work of art must have an impeccable formal structure. He had to face much abuse at the hands of his detractors, although the political compromises he made with them in later years softened the sharpness of his perceptions. But in works like *Kavya Peethika* and *Natakantam Kavivram*, he proved to be a powerful voice on the critical scene for decades.

The past twenty years have seen the birth of several new trends which together may be described as modernist. They seem to have a unique importance in three ways: one, the best of the critical writings of this period have creatively influenced the growth of modernist poetry, fiction and drama in the language; two, they have provided fresh re-interpretations of our past literature or even of foreign literature; three, they have begun to develop a strong theoretical basis which makes Malayalam literary criticism of the eighties autonomous, free and self-reliant. The first of these aspects is represented by the writings

of M.K. Sanoo and K.S. Narayana Pillai on contemporary writers. The second is to be seen in the criticism of P.K. Balakrishnan (*Chandu Menon: a study; Kavya kala Kumaran Asanilude*). The third aspect is just beginning to be set forth by young critics like K.P. Appan, Narendra Prasad, Asha Menon, Sachidanandan and Rajakrishnan. There are also a few writers of the older generation falling between the stools. Their works are seldom better than rhetorical exercises, with an occasional flash here and there.

A general survey of the scene today reveals several names that could be listed on the side of critic-reviewers. M. Leelavathy, K.P. Sankaran, M.N. Vijayan, B. Rajeevan, M.M. Basheer and M. Gangadharan represent between them a very wide range of capability and interests. The Marxist school is represented by E.M.S. Nambudiripad, M.S. Devadas, P. Govinda Pillai, etc. The works of S. Guptan Nair, Sukumar Azhikode, M. Achuthan, N. Krishna Pillai and several others like them fill the period between 1950 and 1980. The most exciting thing now happening in Malayalam literary criticism is the controversy between the modern and post-modern critics and the critic-reviewers of the older generation who are mostly on the defensive. Modernism has had a delayed flowering in criticism—appearing in the seventies only—whereas it had started in poetry in the fifties, in fiction in the sixties, and in drama during the later sixties and seventies. Polemics apart, what is most significant is the theoretical pre-occupations of the young modernists. K.P. Appan, mostly writing on fiction, seems to champion the aesthetics of *Kshobham* and *Thiraskaram*; Narendra Prasad advocates the principles of *Nishedham* and change of *Bhavukatvam*; Asha Menon puts forth the theory of new *Purusharthas*; Rajakrishnan sets up the framework of art as illness; and Thomas Mathew re-defines the concept of the Ivory Tower in a new light. The incorporation of film criticism into the perspective of the literary critic has deepened the awareness behind the experience of reading and interpreting literature. In the hands of these younger critics, and those who are in sympathy with them, criticism is not a secondary manifestation of the talents that go into the making of poetry, fiction or drama. Criticism has come into its own. It is no longer dependent on so-called creative writing. Conceived as a discipline in itself, criticism sets up standards of its own for the evaluation not only of poetry and fiction, drama or film, but even of criticism itself. As in the old days when the concepts of *rasa* and *dhvani* were first enunciated before examples were looked for, so today in Malayalam literary criticism the main effort is concentrated not on book review or interpretation or explication, but on setting up a theoretical foundation not necessarily based on literary works already in existence, but on more abstract,

philosophical or aesthetic considerations. The self-reliance and autonomy of criticism is sure to face the challenge not only of poets and playwrights and novelists of the older school, but also of the traditional critics, for whom a parasitic existence seems to have been most welcome. The growth of an autonomous school of criticism is good for the sound health of other branches of literature as well. It also testifies to the existence of a climate of criticism, as never before in our literary history. But whether all the promises of today will be fulfilled, depends on the years to come.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*.

Feminism and Literature: An Indian Perspective

Vrinda Nabar

An Indian perspective would seem to limit the potential of feminist critical theory in the study of literature. I use the word "limit", for while I do not negate the validity of such theory, I would be skeptical about the extent of its usefulness as a starting-point.

I should add that my skepticism extends to the usefulness of critical theory *per se* in the Indian context, first because most of it is hopelessly derivative (a pioneer of the study of aesthetics as a discipline has described himself as a Kantian-Hegelian-Marxist!) and secondly because its foreignness sits uneasily on the native realities of our class-rooms and scholarship.

Writing of the women's movement in India nearly eleven years ago, I had argued that it was presumptuous to speak of such a movement as if it were a *fait accompli*. My view then, and it remains substantially unchanged, was that we had no women's movement of any significant magnitude or stamina, nothing comparable to the feminism which evolved in the West over a period of nearly two hundred years and took a decisively militant form in the 1960's.

Apart from the literature generated by the movement, the seriousness with which it struck at the foundations of male hegemonic structures was evident in books like Norman Mailer's *The Prisoner of Sex*. This brilliantly sexist riposte was an example of what the movement could mean to the male ego in a purely intellectual Western context.

In spite of some very welcome developments over the past two decades, the women's movement in India remains very much an "in-group" concept. What is heartening is the growing perception and conviction that such a movement will have to take shape and keep pace with the other struggles within our social set-up. The fight against exploitation, after all, is not relevant to caste and class alone. Any meaningful movement against discrimination must admit the women's struggle as a primary and integral part of its manifesto.

While all this may seem old hat to some, the ugly truth is that most haven't even seen the hat yet. Attempting to introduce the basic contradictions in the male-female nexus to my students, I sometimes

see them look at each other as if to say, "She's off on one of her feminist jags again..." When I do a course on "The Emancipated Woman" at the M.Phil. level, I'm appalled at the glib assertions some women in my class make by way of "counter-argument". They vary from the self-righteous "My husband always helps me at home", or "I have never experienced any discrimination", to the deluded "It may have been so once, but not any more"; and so on.

What is especially distressing about such personalised responses is the ostrich-like persistence with which the more uncomfortable issues and realities are dismissed as inconsequential, even exaggerated. Very occasionally, I do succeed in provoking an animated classroom evaluation of the woman/women in the texts studied. In doing so, my broad generic classification of them into "Heroines, Harlots and Hags" usually works, and is also useful as a base on which to build a more disciplined approach.

"Base" in fact is a crucial term, and the Marxian metaphor of base and super-structure an appropriate one in this context. The awareness of the essential conflicts and paradoxes of female-ness would form the very basis of any feminist approach, whether in literature or in life, while theoretical stances would form the super-structure.

In the Indian context, the base even now is all too shaky. This may be seen from the fact that even a writer like Kamala Das, who has been seen as something of a champion of women's freedom, could make this sort of flippant remark as late as 1977:

Off and on I too toy with the idea of joining the Women's Lib. movement, if only to have the fun of walking around with no bra on. Such a delicious pleasure! But you must do it only when there are several men around to throw admiring glances at your full-blown beauty. Otherwise you might as well wear the wretched thing and forget about the movement.

On the other hand, not only Das's poetry but also that of other Indian women has incorporated ideas which, though bare of the jargon of ideology/theory, can only be described as broadly feminist.

The tensions in much of Das's poetry arise out of her need to be treated as woman, not sex-object. In Marathi poetry, poets like Indira Sant and Prabha Ganorkar frequently speak of the conflict between the inner and outer worlds of a woman. Sant's *Her Dreams* enumerates the ordinariness of the poetic *persona* whose dreams are like those of "any woman":

The well-laid table. The balanced day.
Smoothly ironed clothes. Smartly furnished home.

The poem proceeds through these conventional images, but ends on a sharper note: "She awoke before the dreams began,/And never slept soundly again."

The struggle against captivity took isolated but definite, articulate forms long before the twentieth century. An intense but highly individualised strain of resistance can be found in the work of earlier women poets: Janabai and Bahinabai, in Marathi, to name only two. In the north, Meera's unconventional revolt against domesticity has continued to be sung through the *bhajans* she composed as an affirmation of her difference:

Now you can't close me
With walls.
The wise are now dear to me, lost
is womanly shame, I've left
My mother's house.
And the taste of dance is on my tongue.

A mirror's held up to my heart
By the lord.

So take
The wedding necklace, you can
break
The golden bracelet
I don't want a fort or palace
And my hair is loose
Says Meera.

(translated from the Hindi by Shama Futehally)

But, through the centuries, the major voice has been one of silence, the kind Elizabeth Robins referred to in a speech to the WWSL as far back as 1907: "If I were a man and cared to know the world I lived in, I almost think it would make me a shade uneasy—the weight of that long silence of one-half the world." Shashi Deshpande uses this statement as an epigraph to her novel *That Long Silence* (Virago, 1988), which deals with a woman face-to-face with the breakdown of communication in her marriage.

It is this silence that a poet like Imtiaz Dharker commemorates in an early poem titled *A Woman's Place* Mouths must be watched,

especially
if you're a woman. A smile
should be stifled with the sari-end.
No one must see your serenity cracked,
even with delight.

If occasionally you need to scream, do it
 alone, but in front of a mirror
 Where you can see the strange shape the
 mouth makes
 before you wipe it off.

It is the same silence that Bim turns to in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* when she sees all the old family-symbols collapse and her siblings go away while she stays on to look after her retarded brother and dipsomaniac aunt. Would one ever be able to satisfactorily interpret Bim using the existing feminist critical armoury? A Western perspective would interpret her as characteristic of the oppressed female who refuses, intelligent as she is, to break out of her prison. Yet Bim's dilemma, which is coloured by her having to make a choice without alternatives, is both female and Indian. Her choice does not diminish her as a woman or as an individual.

In India, the basic contradictions at every level are so enormous that one sometimes despairs. I speak of a situation where an episode so fundamentally traumatic as Draupadi's *vastraharan* can overnight become material for advertising copy, where bikinis and *burqas*, women-pilots and *satis* strut and fret their hour upon the stage in a seemingly unending procession. A large number of urban, educated people still believe in segregating a menstruating woman during the first three days. The more "enlightened" may discard this ritual but will maintain that a woman should not participate in any religious ceremony during her "unclean" phase!

Few Indian mothers would admit to the authenticity of this powerful outburst by the American feminist writer Adrienne Rich against "the stereotype of the mother whose love is unconditional":

My children cause me the most exquisite
 suffering of which I have any experience.
 It is the suffering of ambivalence: the
 murderous alternation between bitter
 resentment and raw-edged nerves, and
 blissful gratification and tenderness.
 Sometimes I seem to myself, in my feelings
 towards these tiny guiltless beings, a
 monster of selfishness and intolerance.
 Their voices wear away at my nerves,
 their constant needs, above all their
 need for simplicity and patience, fill me
 with despair at my own failure, despair
 too at my fate, which is to serve a function

for which I was not fitted. And I am weak
sometimes from held-in rage...

Events like International Women's Year, International Women's Day, the occasional gestures made by groups and government organisations to focus on women, take the shape of sporadic but largely insubstantial disruptions in the social structure. They ignore a fundamental distinction between the women's struggle and other forms of exploitation. More often than not, this narrow apprehension of what needs to be done, results in the sort of anomaly Margaret Deland describes in her article "The Change in the Feminine Ideal":

I hope I shall not be thought too dogmatic
if I say that I believe there was very
genuine regret among thoughtful women that
there should have been a Woman's Building
at Chicago in 1893, and that it was on the
whole a mortifying and humiliating display.
How much better if the few great things... the
noble pictures, the valuable inventions, the
dignified expressions of any art or science—
had been placed among their peers, and not put
aside as noticeable because women did them.
Such insistence upon sex in work is not only an
insult to the work, but the sex.

My fear in the Indian context is that the struggle could get divorced from its social perspective which is one where the dialectical male-female unit remains so firmly entrenched. Traditional Indian codes and ethics still provide the central impetus to the creative consciousness of the artist and even more so to the masses.

This may be seen in the large following our national epics (or rather, their televised versions) have had, and especially in the direction in which the portrayal of women, whether as mother or as wife, seemed to move. Blessings like "Sowbhagyavati bhava" insist on the husband as giving a woman's life fulfilment, while epithets like "grihalakshmi" seek to deify her slavery.

This same goddess can be seen in D. Vijaya's Kannada poem *Farida Begum* hurrying through the streets in her purdah:

If it flaps a little in the breeze
she sweats and feels faint
as though it had fallen

(Translated from the Kannada by Tejaswini Niranjana)

She is Indira Sant's *Middle-class Gargi*, the subject of all the

newspaper headlines on women's emancipation, who returns home every evening, "shifting from hand to hand/Her hand bag and shopping bags":

That image of her, carefully carried
with her purse
She throws into the fire,
That the tea may be ready sooner.
Her wings are clipped, the tea is poured.
Then at the cooker. The chappatis. The spices.
Difficult children and adults. Sullen servants.
Countless threads which bind her tight.
What a drag! She who cooks
Is the one who is cooked.

In conclusion, I can only reassert that we are speaking of a country where a male child is still unhealthily preferred, and where the last funeral rites are taboo to women: of a country, that is, where a fundamental, virtually unshakeable discrimination operates from birth to death. All talk of feminism and literature must begin by taking note of this essential reality.

Indian Poetry in English Yesterday—Today—Tomorrow

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar

In a recent interview, on being told that "according to one anthology of Indian English Poetry, there are over 300 poets writing in English today", A.K. Ramanujan is reported to have replied, "I say 'good luck' to them. Three hundred is not a large number for such a large country". (*Humanities Review*, January-June 1981, p. 12). No doubt, by American standards (Ramanujan has lived in Chicago for 20 years), 300 is a pitiful number. I have read somewhere that contemporary American poetry comprises the efforts or effusions of a million or more aspirants. This may very well be true, for I find over 500 'poets' represented in the just published *New Voices in American Poetry—1980* (Vantage Press). In UK too, quite a large number—perhaps a thousand or two—seem to be straining after poetic utterance. As for India, the checklists at the end of the attractively sariclad 'Writers Workshop' volumes of poetry look more and more impressive as the years pass; and new poetry publishing houses—Poets Press, Clearing House, Prayer Books, Samkaleen Prakashan, Arnold-Heinemann—seem to be striving against odds to give a chance to the Indian-English poets. There are, besides, poetry and verse periodicals, including *Poet* (Madras), *Indian Verse* (Calcutta) and *Skylark* (Aligarh). Perhaps this fecundity is stimulated by the vogue for free verse that is apt to be as free as free; and perhaps, as A.K. Srivatsava speculates, "the experimental bizarrerie of much English and American poetry written in recent years provokes in the Indian poet an irresponsible and reckless daring" (*Commonwealth Quarterly*, September 1980, p. 115).

Abundance is certainly a blessing, for only when many seek self-expression in verse, a few at least will achieve in course of time indubitable poetic utterance. But such excess must also raise problems for the 'common reader'. It is here that the anthologist and the critic find their ready occupation. *Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1959), edited by P. Lal and Raghavendra Rao, was important, not so much for the actual selections, but for the high-pitched juvenile battle-cries the editors raised against Sri Aurobindo (and the Romantics of yester-

day) and the strident claims they made on behalf of the 'new poetry'. Lal's far more sumptuous 600 page *Modern Indian Poetry in English* ("that big indiscriminate anthology", according to Ramanujan) came out in 1969, and presented 150 poets, "most of them" (according to Pritish Nandy) "one-poem-only-by-accident versifiers, never heard of since". Gokak's *Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry* followed in 1970, and gave representation to the different 'schools': over 108 poets in all, from Derozio and Michael Madhusudan to Ramanujan and P. Lal. The Anthology nevertheless provoked a comment from a practising poet that it was not the 'Golden Treasury', but only the tinsel 'waste-paper basket' of Indian-English poetry; some of our poets *can* be cattish when in their sour moods. Saleem Peeradina's *Contemporary Indian Poetry in English* and Pritish Nandy's *Indian Poetry in English: 1947-1972* both appeared in 1972. Pritish described Gokak's anthology as "dated and misleading" and Peeradina's as "blantly biased". Pritish's own basket contained 30 of the new poets (including himself). Adil Jussawalla's *New Writing in English* (1974) was content to house only what was *not* (in his opinion) "tedious, other-worldly, irritating"; and he had no use for the native tradition which is nothing but "a vagueness of thought, an absolute faith in the mystical, and a blind reliance on the heart". Oh for doses of clarity, actuality, clinical intellectuality: and so they came, the tribe of anthologists: Gauri Deshpande, R.P.N. Sinha, A.N. Dwivedi, Syed Ameeruddin, Subhas C. Saha, O.P. Bhatnagar, R. Parthasarathy, Keki Daruwalla. Ameeruddin's *Indian Verse in English* (1977) found room for 41 poets (himself included), and his *New Voices* (1981) accommodates over sixty. Bhatnagar's anthology, with his own commendable Introduction, appeared in the special Indo-English Poetry Number of *Commonwealth Quarterly* (June 1980), and presented 21 poets including several of the lesser known. Of rather more restricted scope was Subhas C. Saha's *An Anthology of Indo-English Love Poetry*, which appeared in 1977.

Two anthologies, however, stand a little apart: (1) *Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*, chosen and edited by R. Parthasarathy, 1976; and (2) *Two Decades of Indian Poetry: 1960-1980*, edited by Keki N. Daruwalla, 1980. The latter, with its heavy concentration of Parsi and Bombay-centred poets, as also of expatriates, excluded Pritish Nandy, and provoked a massive onslaught by the aggrieved poet in the columns of *Sunday*; and Daruwalla replied with equal ferocity. This throwing about of brains led to a brief comment by a reader in *Sunday* that it was a case of "one literary goonda" attacking another, leaving it free for the 'common reader' to enjoy the work of Toru, Sarojini Naidu and other poets of yesterday. Parthasarathy's anthology

too has had its critics. Fourteen out of the "50 odd poems" in the anthology are his own, and reviewing his book, Vinay Dharwadkar said (*Indian and Foreign Review* May 1977, p. 21):

"Seven sections (from R. Parthasarathy's *Rough Passage*) are placed in the anthology to represent the poet, and are prefaced by a critical note by Parthasarathy himself, a violation of editorial ethics'. Like other anthologists, Daruwalla too believes that generosity, like charity, begins at home. He is among his select seventeen, and gets 12 pages, while Kamala Das has to be content with 8, Nissim Ezekiel 10; Jayanta Mahapatra (probably the best of them all) gets 7, and A.K. Ramanujan a mere 4 pages. In the prefatory note about himself, Daruwalla proclaims: "For me a riot-stricken town is landscape". Bravo! "Writing" he says elsewhere, "is like a clot going out of the blood". Bravo again!

Look at the titles of the two anthologies. 'Two Decades of Indian Poetry'—not Indo-Anglian, or Indo-English, but 'Indian'. "Look!" Daruwalla seems to announce; "we the exhibited seventeen are the sovereign poetic voices of contemporary India". Parthasarathy's title is even more audacious: "Look, Look! I and my fellow-nine are 20th Century Poetry-India". I wonder how respectable firms like Vikas and OUP can acquiesce in such exercises in misleading the unwary public.

Once adroit spirits like Daruwalla and Parthasarathy decide to reduce the several hundreds of practitioners of poetry to a mere seventeen or ten while finding for themselves safe and roomy anchorages, the reader in a hurry finds his task drastically simplified—indeed to the point of absurdity. But this is not all. These anthologists-cum-poets are also critics who are only too ready to assume the god, affect the nod, and seem to shake the spheres. They not only write about themselves with pardonable gusto, but they also don't hesitate to charge at others with whipped-up vehemence. Their pet aversion is Sri Aurobindo, who symbolises for them the Romantic, other-worldly and mystical that they would gladly disown with finality. Not for Daruwalla and Parthasarathy alone, but for some other bullcalves too of the current poetic season, "romantic" is a veritable red rag, a "double-dirty twice-four letter word" (in M.K. Naik's coinage). Let's not forget that these are our rebels and idol-breakers, our metrical Hippies and Naxalites, and therefore they needs must make wry faces at the generations of poets from Derozio to Harindranath, and also concentrate their neutronic wrath on Sri Aurobindo, and especially his *Savitri*. According to Raghavendra Rao, writers like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo "used the English language, not as creators, but as manipulators". Thus Adil Jussawalla, writing 14 years later:

"To my mind—*Savitri*—unwinding like an interminable sari through 12 Books and about 24,000 lines in one vast onion of a poem..."

Adil's petulant discomfiture is not unlike Duschasana's in the Kuru Court, and must needs spit itself out in muddled metaphors. And Parthasarathy blithely coos in chorus with Rao and Adil:

"*Savitri* fails as a poem because Ghose's talent and resourcefulness in the use of English were limited".

Of course; he didn't take a course in linguistics at Leeds, and didn't attend the International Writing Programme at Iowa.

And yet, for sheer critical ineptitude and insolence, the prize should go to Daruwalla:

"...it is rather unfair to pick on Sri Aurobindo because no other Indian poet was half as bad, none so nebulous or verbose or who so thoroughly confused the inflated with the sublime".

Is it of such perversions of judgement that the poet of *Savitri* wrote:

A bull-throat bellowed with its brazen tongue:
Its hard shameless clamour filling space
And threatening all who dared to listen to truth
Claimed the monopoly of the battered ear!

Daruwalla presumably understands the Police Manual, but although he does turn out poems now and then with a haunting power of articulation, he is clearly too ignorant, too conceited and too dogmatic to be a dependable guide to Indian English poetry. He has neither the required sensibility, nor even a modicum of critical responsibility.

Parthasarathy too can pontificate with a morbid high seriousness all his own:

"Toru Dutt's poems mean little to us because our idea of poetry has changed since her day. This raises a crucial question: can we know outside or beyond our own era's ideas about language?"

Carry the argument to the logical conclusion, and where are you? All past poetry—Valmiki, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Kamban, Shelley, Whitman, even Eliot—is irrelevant and unintelligible. We can therefore only complacently play at Narcissus, and grow oblivious of everything else. Again, in the course of an article in *Humanities Review* (July-September 1979):

"It (pre-1947 poetry) has the vitality, or what was left of it, of an enslaved nation".

Is Parthasarathy insinuating that all pre-1947 poetry had the stigma of slavery, that it was flawed and emasculated for that reason, whereas now our poetry is electrically free? Subramania Bharati's poetry in Tamil—to cite only a single example—had only a notional or residual

vitality? Or perhaps the implied denigration applies to the Indian-English alone? And as for the vaunted latter-day explosion of poetic freedom, M.K. Naik writers:

"The King Log of Milton-Shelley-Tennyson has been succeeded by the King Stork of Eliot-Yeats-Auden. The Ape has conquered again".

It is almost always a question of the Western voice finding its Indian echo "with, of course, the inevitable distortions".

Finally, what is one to make of this portentous asseveration:

"A poem ought to, in effect, try to arrest the flow of language, to anaesthetise it, to petrify it, to fossilise it".

Are our poets no more than Gorgons whose death-stare petrifies flesh and blood into granite and charnokite? Or is it rather that each poem is an Ahalya waiting patiently to be quickened into life by the hallowed feet of Sri Rama? It's the Rasika, then, who makes the poem, not the poet! There's something in this, perhaps.

What is said above—said in sadness and not in anger—in no way qualifies my admiration for a good deal of the 'new poetry' and several of its practitioners, and not least Daruwalla and Parthasarathy at their best. Lyrics like Nissim Ezekiel's 'Night of the Scorpion,' Kamala Das's 'The Invitation', Daruwalla's 'Boat-ride along the Ganga', Nandy's 'Near Deshpriya Park they found him at last', Lal's 'Not dangerously perhaps', Parthasarathy's 'I am no longer myself as I watch', O.P. Bhatnagar's 'Like Phoenix risen from the Ashes', Ramanujan's 'A River' and Jayanta Mahapatra's new long poem 'Relationship' that intertwines the creepers of longing and affliction and ecstasy—these and quite a few others—have struck me with their beauty of controlled emotion and thought and utterance. Of course the mass of our poetry, being born of irritation, frustration, alienation, exhibits only a wayward curiosity of matter and ingenious ventriloquism in style. It is a species of mini-skirt verse-mongering that pleases neither the ear nor the mind. Snaps of realistic portraiture, turns of a moral attitudinisation, essayings in the denigration of what earlier poets had admired or held sacred, and no end of hysterical confessionism and stimulated self-flagellation: such is the main stuff of current poetry, here and elsewhere. At their best they are poets all right, after the ruling fashion: what they generally lack is vision, hope, reverence, grace, faith. This is symptomatic of the times, perhaps, but there can be another Dawn, and sooner than we dare to hope for. In the meantime, it seems to me that the considerable body of the authentic poetry of our time can be highlighted without over-emphatically denying, denigrating or desecrating the poetry of yesterday.

As for the future, it needn't be too readily taken for granted, that

poets will for all time to come settle for the small scale, the satiric, the ironic, the anti-romantic, the anti-spiritual, or opt for the Freudian fascination for the libidos, the diseased preoccupation with the putrid gutter of the dark unconscious, the fatefully irresistible impulse to foul one's nest be it one's own country, one's village with its temples, tanks and river, or one's home and family and household gods, or the irrational urge to tarnish diminish destroy rather than to heighten, greaten and create. There are doubtless the problems of language, identity and audience, the need for roots, the need for a faith in poetry, the need for a hope for the future, but nothing is gained by making a mystique, of our current irritations, fads and fanaticisms, mystifying others and mystifying ourselves. One of our poets calls English in India "a nowhere language", while another deems it an 'everywhere language' in India. Yet another talks of the parameters of appropriateness for Indian English, and presumably they extend as far as Leeds, Chicago and Adelaide. Does the typical Indian-English poet go Indian when he is abroad, and go West when he is back in India? Is the way to be 'Indian' to accomplish artificial transmigration through British or American alienhood? Is there an 'equation' that will explain "the relationship of a poem to its ethos"? Do quanta of Indian experience voyage to strange alien continents of language, and through a forced marriage of native experience and foreign expression precipitate an Indian-English piece? In all this critical cross-fire, where shall we look for enlightenment?

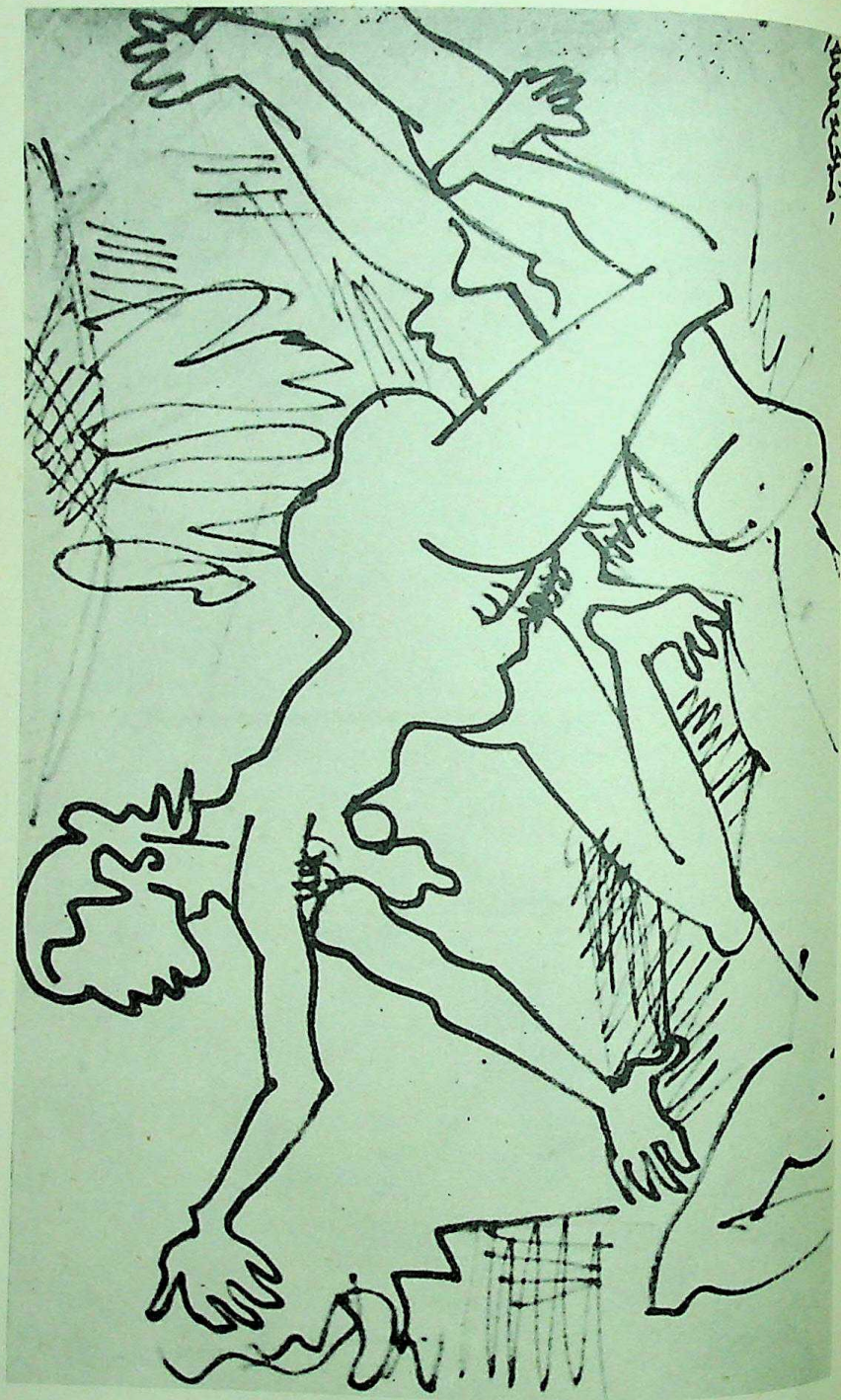
As for the overwhelming question "Why English?" Lal affirms, "without trying to be facetious,....that only in English real Indian poetry can be written"; any other poetry is likely to be "Bengali-slanted or Gujarati-biased, and so on." But Parthasarathy thinks that we should really reconcile ourselves to "Kannada English verse, Marathi English verse, Tamil English verse, and so on." The only common ground between the twin prophets, Lal and Parthasarathy, is the phrase "*and so on*" We want 'Indianness' in our English, and smart critics look for it with their own Geiger counters. But while some look for deposits of regional culture, others demand a whiff of the universal. And M. Chalapathi Rau says deflatingly, "Indian English can be only bad English, and nothing else. Yiddish is far more legitimate and interesting"!

Will the future Indian poetry, then, perpetuate the current self-tortured poignancy and vagabond eccentricity in theme, stance and expression, or (as Sri Aurobindo prophesied) achieve a breakthrough in consciousness and approximate to the 'mantra'? It is my own hope and prayer that the future Indian poetry—and with it, poetry in English—will strive towards a symphony of many notes omitting no

part of the human experience, rejecting no segment of our national poetic heritage since the time of the vedic singers and the Sangam poets, but insinuating the interpenetrating 'bootstrap' unity of the local and the universal, the personal and the transcendental, as also of *vak* and *artha*, matter and spirit, outer and inner life, the dynamics of becoming and the poise of Being. It is with this hope and faith that I would venture to recall these prophetic lines from *Savitri*:

Out of the paths of the morning star they came
Into the little room of mortal life...
Carrying the magic word, the mystic fire,
Carrying the Dionysian cup of joy...
Highpriests of wisdom, sweetness, might and bliss,
Discoverers of Love's laughing fiery floods
And dancers within rapture's golden doors.
Their tread one day shall change the suffering earth
And justify the light on Nature's face.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*.



A Tentative Gujarati Response

Ramanlal Joshi

Is there a climate of criticism in our literatures? In setting forth to find an answer to this question, I would naturally turn for evidence to the one literature I know a little closely: I am referring to Gujarati literature. I would like to add immediately that my answer is in its very nature tentative and limited by my personal response to the situation as it obtains in the field of creative and critical writings in Gujarati today.

Literary criticism as an activity consciously seeking to engage the creative impulse in the language, to examine its assumptions and to set up norms, is little over a century old in Gujarati. It was born in the middle of the last century as a by-product of what is called the Indian Renaissance. It largely drew its inspiration from the contact with Western Culture which was made possible by the setting up of the Universities in the country. This is a situation which is possibly shared by literatures in the other regional languages as well. I would admit therefore that, yes, literary criticism in Gujarati, especially during its initial formative phase was certainly derivative. The main point I would like to make here, in this paper, however, is that Gujarati Literary Criticism is today in a flourishing state, and it has far outgrown its colonial character. Perhaps, it would be true to say that criticism is ahead of the creative impulse in Gujarati writing today. This is a situation which is a little suspect and I would not insist on it.

Instead of trying to present a historical survey of the growth of literary criticism in Gujarati, I would prefer to focus attention more on the present-day critical scene. It was especially during the last decade, the seventies, that critical activity picked up momentum in Gujarati. One of the factors which probably contributed to this development was the emergence of a number of younger talents who had their base in the department of Gujarati in Colleges and Universities. These younger men had a massive exposure to the most recent developments in modern Western critical theories. By and large, the trend was towards a formalist outlook, and chiefly French Symbolist thinking

as represented by Valery, Mallarme and others exercised a great influence on the minds of these younger critics. A chief exponent of this formalist view in Gujarati is Suresh Joshi. He verified literary concepts, emphasised (rather over-emphasised) the formal aspect of a literary work, insisted on practical-textual criticism (as against socio-cultural frame of reference), and conducted a campaign for removing the ambiguity in critical terminology. He is a formalist critic of the highest order. He conducted a re-examination of established opinions and evaluations. Suresh Joshi was chiefly responsible for creating a climate in which younger critics could freely explore the newer approaches in practical as well as theoretical fields of literary criticism. As a result, today we have critics like Suman Shah, Chandrakant Topiwala, Radheshyam Sharma and others who try to import some of the more recent structuralist and even post-structuralist ideas in Gujarati. Suman Shah has already published a monograph on structuralism, and he and Chandrakant Topiwala have tried to analyse some of the Gujarati poems and short stories along newer lines. Chandrakant Topiwala, particularly, is trying to apply newer linguistic models in analysing Gujarati poetry. One might mention Radheshyam Sharma as yet another critical talent, belonging to the same group. These critics however belong to an extremely avant-garde camp and their attempts, though well meaning, may yet be called only experimental and it would be premature to rate their contribution. One might mention yet another range of critical talents: Sitanshu Yasheshchandra, Yashvant Trivedi, Digish Mehta, Prabodh Parik, and numerous others, who while not being so intensively 'modern' in their outlook, are yet well informed in both Indian and Western critical theories. Sitanshu especially has had his training in the States and he has specialised on the one hand in Kantian aesthetics and on the other in the aesthetic theory of Jagannath. These critics have a more stable critical outlook and provide a sound basis to the formation of critical opinion and judgement, often their approach is interdisciplinary and comparative. An intriguing feature of the present day critical scene in Gujarati is the predominance of the theoretical and speculative branch leaning towards aesthetics. A major figure in this respect is that of Dr. Harivallabh Bhayani who is himself a linguist and who has cultivated an abiding interest in Prakrit and medieval literatures. He would prefer to have the approaches of traditional Sanskrit Poetics extended to modern Gujarati creative writings. As Dr. Bhayani puts it in a speech delivered on the occasion of his being presented a Sahitya Akademi Award for 1981: 'I may mention...that I came to the theory of literature and literary criticism via philology and linguistics. Recent critical approaches to literature have been heavily leaning on

the linguistics, structural and semiotic aspects of the literary text (and, in some cases, on the reader's response). I found very significant parallels in the Indian theory of poetry and criticism. Numerous views of R. Jakobson, J. Culler, R. Sholes, M. Riffaterre, of Russian formalists and of the sponsors of stylistics, structuralism, semiotics, and hermeneutics can be looked upon as almost re-statements of what was said very much earlier by Bhamah, Vamana, Anandavardhana, Kuntaka, Abhinavagupta, Jagannatha and others. The treatment of the aesthetics of verbal structures in the Indian tradition seems in numerous cases more perceptive, penetrating and sound, and the critical analysis, more systematic and thorough'.

Dr. Bhayani's statement in a way answers the question how far Sanskrit poetics can help us formulate our judgement of literatures in the regional languages today. It is obvious that despite the optimism of Dr. Bhayani—and I am sure, he has his counterparts in other regional languages as well—I fear, Sanskrit Poetics will have to be given a lot of airing before its main principles could be made applicable to modern creative writing in regional languages. In Gujarati, for instance, there have emerged creative talents whose writings are extremely experimental in character. I might mention the names of Labhshankar, Sitanshu, who in their poems adopt symbolist and surrealist techniques. I wonder how far a traditional poetics based on Abhinavagupta or Jagannatha or Kuntaka can be made applicable to the creative writing of today. I would not give up all attempts in this direction. All I would like to submit is that I have my own reservations on this point.

Here I would like to add that the best examples of traditional criticism being written today are Umashankar Joshi, Sundaram, Vishnu-prasad Trivedi and Niranjan Bhagat. Other critics in this tradition are Jayant Pathank, 'Ushnas', Yashvant Shukla, C.N. Patel, Ramanlal Joshi, Bholabhai Patel, Raghuvir Chandari, Chandrakant Sheth, Jayant Kothari, Suresh Dalal, Harindra Dave, Pramodkumar Patel etc.

In the field of philology and linguistics Harivallabh Bhayani, Shantibhai Acharya, Dayashankar Joshi and Yogendra Vyas are notable. In the field of editing texts of medieval literature and of related scholarship, K. K. Shastri, Bhogilal Sandesara, K. B. Vyas, Bhupendra Trivedi, Ramanlal C. Shah, Dhiru Parikh have done valuable work.

Periodicals like 'Sanskriti', 'Granth', 'Buddhiprakash', 'Forlies Sabha Trimasik' have been actively engaged in literary criticism.

Ramanlal Joshi, besides his own books of criticism, has started editing the Gujarati Men of Letters series of which thirty monographs have been published so far.

Thus, in the course of a century, we have tried different critical methods, sociological, philosophical, aesthetic, subjective, objective, practical and analytical.

One obvious feature of the present-day critical scene in Gujarati is a lack of contact between the critical and the creative aspects of the Gujarati literary genius. The critics who really matter are experts at theorising at a high level, but either from prejudice or sheer illiteracy of a kind, these critics somehow refuse to comment on the large bulk of output in the creative field in Gujarati. They prefer to keep talking about Kafka or Camus or Sartre and do not even take notice of the creative writing produced by a large number of writers or professionals. Their chief complaint is that there is hardly a work in Gujarati creative writing which would bear the expert analysis which they are capable of performing.

This is a peculiar situation and I wonder whether it has its parallel in any of the other regional languages. This is a kind of elitism among Gujarati critics. A possible antidote is the presence of a Marxist stand but in Gujarati we have hardly any critic of status who has cared to look at literature from a Marxist or even a sociological point of view. It is noteworthy however that an approach of this kind was prevalent in the thirties in Gujarati. But for some reason, this critical movement lapsed during the subsequent years. Perhaps the over-riding impact of Gandhian ideology has something to do with this situation. After all, Gandhiji himself is a major literary figure and writer in Gujarati, in his own right and his immense influence must have played its part in this phenomenon.

Which brings us back to the question which is almost a cliché, namely, the question of the Gujaratiness of Gujarati critical writing today. Very often we find that the younger critics like younger writers in Gujarati are too much fascinated by the glamour of the Western critical models. This is not to ask for a total refusal to look at what the Western critical genius has to offer but all I would emphasise is the point that we in Gujarati could be a good deal more independent in our critical approach. It would seem that an average Gujarati critic is ill at ease if he does not find himself in a position to quote a foreign critic in every third line of his writing. This dependence has to go. It shows that we have not attained a certain maturity. In the absence of such an outlook sometimes the performance of even the best among our critics looks a little ridiculous at times. The average Gujarati critic cannot free himself from the apron strings of that Western culture which he has historically inherited and which he keeps on imitating, almost out of sheer habit.

It would seem that the situation in Gujarati is no different from

the situation in other regional languages. There is the same need to shake off the traces of our ex-colonial status and to move forward to attain a new sense of identity; for a better parallel, one might look even outside India to other Commonwealth countries which had a similar past and which at present are engaged in a similar quest for identity. Thus, a writer in Nigeria or in Kenya would easily appreciate the difficulties experienced by the younger Gujarati critics as well as writers today.

There is an interesting feature of the present-day literary scene in Gujarati which may be noted. Actually Nissim Ezekiel, the well-known poet and critic, made a reference to it in a series of lectures he delivered at Gujarat University the other day. He referred to the fact that Gujaratis in large numbers have settled in various parts of the world today. These Gujarati-speaking communities whether in England or in America or in Africa, live there as immigrants. As such they find themselves as if torn between two cultures. There are already signs of these Gujaratis abroad seeking to express themselves in creative terms. They have a new experience to convey. Perhaps this will help fill the gap felt so far, and this writing will have that complexity and richness which is missed by the more advanced among critics in Gujarati today. This might help change the critical climate in favour of indigenous writing to a considerable extent.

One has to concede that the present phase in Gujarati writing, and this includes critical writing, appears to be one of stagnation in a way. There are a number of critics who courageously try to keep up the necessary sense of urgency for the right observance of critical norms. It is important however, these norms be *ours* and not borrowed from elsewhere. This is a difficult quest. A number of factors, literary as well as extra-literary, are involved here. The outcome will be governed by a tension of a number of opposed pulls. One could only hope that such a tension will work out effectively to lead to the emergence of a proper critical climate. It is a challenge to the newer critical talents, and such talents, I am glad to say, are not wanting in Gujarati today.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*



The Perennials of Narayan's Writing

Raji Narasimhan

Let us say straightaway that this latest book of R.K. Narayan's is a flawed work. There is a self-consciousness here, a knowing attempt by the Narayan of today to reproduce the Narayan of yesteryear. The reminiscings of childhood and youth that the middle-aged Nagaraj indulges in, for instance, are familiar. Jagan, of the *Vendor of Sweets* indulges in them, for one. We notice, in addition, a further unfortunate twist coming to make these re-reminiscings. And that is, that the child profiles of Narayan—of Swami in *Swami and Friends* and in innumerable short stories, where Narayan has shown himself at his best—get re-evoked. This vague, drifting repetitiveness seems even more of a let down for Narayan fans than the conscious reproducing mentioned earlier.

One admits that a lot of the pleasure of reading Narayan is in the factor of recognition, of re-encounters with familiar characters and scenes. The Talkative Man, the streets of Malgudi, the photographer Jairaj, the old grandmother, are all legitimate stock characters. But obviously, however legitimate, they cannot stand self-conscious re-creation by the author.

In the second place, there are a couple of stark, sexual references that are simply out of character for Narayan. On the polished and carved teakwood doors of Nagaraj's ancestral house, are brass knobs that, we are told, look like virginal breasts. "...when very young, Nagaraj used to stand on his toes to try to reach those nipples with his lips; his brother, who was taller and always luckier, took his mouth to the knobs and clicked his tongue in appreciation, crying, 'Oh, that milk is so sweet!'"

There is a coarseness here, a clumsy attempt to be with it, which distresses one as totally unworthy of Narayan.

Thirdly, there is a faltering in the sketching of Nagaraj's character. We have known Nagaraj before in Jagan, even in the younger heroes like Srinivas of the *Maneater of Malgudi* or Raju of *The Guide*. And we know that he cannot be ignorant of mythology as he is shown here. He would never wonder, as he does, what the Cosmic Egg is.

He would know. He might be exasperated with it—as he is in the novel, and which is a facet of him we accept—but he will never not know.

However, after making due deductions for these and some other blemishes, we come to the solid pleasures of the book, pleasures which are rooted in the perennials of Narayan's writing, perennials that are absolving and possess a natural immunity to the risks of repetition. They are not consciously recreated, obviously. They are there because they have to be there, given the sensibility bents of Narayan. Without them Narayan wouldn't be Narayan.

These perennials flash into view, engulfing the length and breadth of the work, at the peak of crisis. And in their contents, they proclaim a cultural continuum within the author, and the unconscious shaping of his psyche.

All of Narayan's books illustrate this, as we said. *The Guide*, *The Vendor of Sweets*, and even *The Dark Room*, with its dignified, old-world feminism, brought into play by the presence of the feminine mystique in Narayan's southern brahmanical sensibility, all show the convergent power of what can be called a sense of cosmic inscrutability. But it is in the *Maneater of Malgudi* that it comes in for the most rounded and perfectly timed materialisation, making for that even distribution of weight, which gives literature its true sensuousness.

Let us consider then, in greater detail, this inner garden of faith and belief, which is the generator of Narayan's creativity. As we said in the beginning, this interiority flashes into view at the height of crisis, caused by the operation of a threat. And this threat is almost always an alien force, rocking the way of life inherited and jealously guarded by the protagonist. In *The Maneater* this threatening, alien force rocking the universe of protagonist Srinivas is Vasu. Braggart, killer of animals, toughie who mocks life by caricaturising it for his unholy profession of taxidermy.

The hub of Srinivas's universe is his ancestral home. All Narayan's heroes live in such a home. In the fictional logic of Narayan the ancestral house is an outer, earthly projection of the celestial design internalised by him and bequeathed to his heroes. Its characteristic is silence, the murmurous and flowing silence reigning in its spacious, sparsely peopled chambers, its halls with pillars and the ceilings, its courtyards of polished stone. The inmates of this house live in a state of dreamy, umbilical contact with the family past, making them generally low key of speech.

This exclusivist, elitist and pacifist self-absorption is in utter contrast to the stridency, and militant self-glorification of Vasu, living directly above Srinivas in the attic Srinivas has let to him in a moment of misguided charity. The physical nearness, and the overhead site

of this nearness make the factor of threat particularly well realised. Srinivas simply cannot get Vasu out of his system. Sitting in his printing press, correcting proofs, registering the sequenced noises of the press, with its ancient treadle machine chug-chugging, and the agreeable crowding in of known hands at work on known tasks, Srinivas is yet distraught. His composure is being dangerously undermined by the enemy sitting there in the loft overhead.

What is specifically being violated in Srinivas's universe is pacifism, particularly, the extensions of this pacifist tendency into the realm of animals. It is an extension and eco-awareness natural in the anthropomorphic bents of Hinduism. Srinivas has a cheerful fellowship and sense of oneness with the squirrels, the rabbits, the dogs and other varieties of fauna circulating around Malgudi. And it is precisely these tiny, modest lives that Vasu is busy impaling on his taxidermist's prongs. Srinivas fumes, shaken and outraged at this streak of wanton destructiveness he sees in the human make up.

But his as yet passive simmering mounts into reckless rage when he comes to know that Vasu's forthcoming target is the temple elephant. An elephant tugs at his mythic susceptibilities in a way he cannot help or ignore. Anointed and impregnated with all the saps and fervours of mythology, it is an animal that is for him almost human and a surrogate god. It magnifies and makes more animate and potent, the sense of sacred oneness he feels with the smaller animals in a more unhurried and everyday way. And when an elephant is a temple elephant as is the one marked by Vasu, its symbolic power and value naturally increases manifold. Srinivas is paranoid with fears about the impending doom of his universe.

This is a peak point in the story. It is a stage when the vulnerabilities of the protagonist stand fully exposed. There has to be a dramatic emphasis here, one that recapitulates and re-iterates the nerve centres of the story, and show up the psychic genes of the author. And Narayan, driven by the compulsion of composition, proceeds to provide the required emphasis.

In practical terms it means telescoping the universe of Srinivas. And this telescoping has been done entirely through an imagery constructed round the central motif of crowds. We see a host of humanity, unnumbered hordes, lit by the rapturous release from the cares of daily life that the enactment of an annual temple ritual brings. We see the temple elephant, completely at ease and playfully swaying in this sea of humanity, its mass and weight balancing those of the crowd. There is music, and there is a sense of the smells of incense and camphor being wafted from the temple precincts.

Providing counterweight to this picture of faith and bustle, is that

of Vasu posted at his attic window, gun pointed at the elephant. Srinivas is there in the mass of crowds, flailing, tossed ineffectually in all directions by his battling emotions. He would like to communicate to the crowd, without sending it into panic, of the danger facing it. And he would also like to ward off the danger without having to speak to the crowd, by some superhuman power that he wishes would come to his agitated, secretly warding hands.

This tableau of the junctioning of divine benediction and human hungers, and their spilling over into uncontrollable waves is a representation of Narayan's inner world. As the narrative develops, the tableau gets erased of detail, and its features dissolve in an image of the void—featureless, an externalisation of the protagonist's, imperceptible, but none the less there, striving towards a life beyond that of the householder's, one that puts him in close communion with nature, imparting a cosmic dignity to his life.

In *The Maneater* this dissolution is presented in the simplest and briefest way, rising from the logic of the crowd image. Srinivas just passes out. His tensions have just become too much for him. His intelligence buckles down, and black out takes over.

He recovers, of course. Help is at hand, for after all he is a man of standing, of good brahmin stock, with its legacy of privilege. But his re-awakening into consciousness is like a second birth. It is into a world of utter tranquillity that he re-awakes, a world a good bit like the idyllic, post-householder's realms that he has always yearned for. Vasu has died at his own hands. His death is an enactment of the Bhasmasura legend in the Puranas. Like Bhasmasura, Vasu too has to beware of his right hand. It is his instrument of killing as well as of self-annihilation. A mosquito buzzes round his head as he sits with poised gun at the attic window, and he swipes at it with his lethal right hand, causing the snapping of some vital nerve in his skull. He falls down dead.

The procession has concluded peacefully. The world is restored its equilibrium. But it is more than a restoration for Srinivas. It is a movement forward in time, a cyclical revolution gone through in his consciousness. The storm has passed over and the earth is mellow again with the murmur of leaves and the mutedness so vital a feature of his world. His treadle machine is chug-chugging away gently in the homely confines of his press. And the transmutation of this undefined atmospheric humming into defined and significant speech is performed by Sastri, the proof-reader of Srinivas's press. In his drone of quiet and unassuming faith Sastri narrates the stories of nemesis incumbent in malignant, larger-than-life characters, as portrayed in the mythologies. Srinivas listens, feels purified, baptised in the waters of

the void, re-emerged, restored and reborn.

This close and liberative encounter with the void can be taken as the ultimate abstract of Narayan's inner landscape. In every book it comes in, in some form or the other, as the real denouement over and above the play of events. In *The Vendor of Sweets* the crossing of the river to the opposite bank where the mad sculptor lives, carving his images, is the denouement. Jagan is released from the pains of householdership and its ethical bottlenecks by this act of crossing over and performing a rite of passage. In *The Guide* this rite of passage is shown in a more complex way, since the novel itself is more complexly structured. Raju, the sentimental and strayed tourist guide, ends up as a village holy man, with powers to cause rain attributed to him. It is a frightening situation, with the villagers' threat-filled, superstitious adulations of Raju rubbing shoulders with his own surfaced atavisms. His sense of the possible and the not possible blurs, rising into a state of hallucination in which he convinces himself that by immersing himself into the river he would cause the rains to burst out of their confines in the skies in wild elemental acclaim of his spontaneous self-offering.

No such thing takes place—Narayan is not a writer of miraculous tales. Raju dies. But his death evokes a sense of a great hush, of a slide forward into some happier, absolved region of being that Raju has made.

It is this interaction with the void that makes a familiar, even though slightly changed, appearance in *The World of Nagaraj*, lifting it above its shortfalls and restoring our reading pleasure fully. The void here is imaged as the state of incoherence and nothingness before speech, before coherence and composition. Nagaraj is straining to make a start in his project of writing the life of the rishi Narad. From this opening situation the novel makes a sustained movement towards the all-important encounter with the void that Nagaraj has to make, like all his predecessors. The alien force, or the catalyst, that accelerates this movement and supplies the urgency and momentum, is the singing of his daughter-in-law. It is singing that sweeps with it all the loudness and in that appals Nagaraj (that is, Narayan) about populist modernism or modernist populism. The daughter-in-law sings film songs, instant eruptions, tin-plated melodies that seem to gush at the slightest pressure from sacs around the throat. It is music that violates all the canons of music that Nagaraj has, as something unpremeditated, invoking timeless serenities and cosmic vistas. Reinforcing this music of the throat and the gills, divorced from the soul, is the accompanying instrument, the harmonium, that she uses. How different is the open-faced bellow of this instrument from the retiring yet pervasive murmur

of the tanpura! And there are other irritants demolishing all his norms of taste. Saroja is squat of build, while Nagaraj's preference is for the willowy and slender in woman, the type that merges with the scene, not stand away from it. Saroja is free in her behaviour with her husband, Tim, (Nagaraj's adored, adopted son) that seems to Nagaraj brazen, seems de-culturised, not innate, not candid. Saroja is vocal, too vocal, with no language of the eyes, none of the poetry of the unsaid, none of the feminine mystery and power of suggestion he wants. It is to escape these assaults on his privacies, those havens in his mind where he is at peace with himself, that he shuts himself up in his room, driven to precipitating the task of writing his book, about which he has been content to dream all this time.

It is a movement in the right direction, the first step in the blind, stumbling grope towards the goal, which every Narayan hero makes, and which forms the heart of the drives of Narayan's writings.

Nagaraj's shutting himself up, of course, does not result in any miraculous release of creative powers. And again, this impasse, this sense of being fenced in and straining at the leash, is a typical foreshadowing of the headlong rush into the unknown, which is to be the climax. The most explosive expression of this bursting the fetters and charging forward is seen in *The Financial Expert*. The hero of this book has to find a blue lotus for the special pooja he has to perform. Through forest and through woodland he crashes along, till he stumbles upon the flower in a setting of temple and lake, a setting that is a formalisation of the formless, one which is more complete and detailed than what Narayan usually provides.

In *The World of Nagaraj*, Nagaraj, wandering in his quest for hard data on Narada (none of the sacred texts are of help here) lands up at the house of the owner of the stationery shop he frequents. The shop owner, it turns out, has an ancient manuscript called Narada Purana, which he undertakes to read out to Nagaraj since it is in Hindi, and which he has to translate for Nagaraj to take down notes. Nagaraj is, of course, more than willing. But after weeks of this exercise, he begins to have grave doubts if the manuscript is really about Narada. There is no title on it, and all this time what has been read out to him is a prelude, a description of a vast, featureless expanse of water enveloped in darkness, in which the Cosmic Egg containing the earth, the stars, the moon and the planets of the solar system, floats. How long is it to be for the egg to burst and life to appear, all the rich and varied forms of it, of which Narada is a part? Nagaraj is exasperated. And, "after a lot of Cosmic Egg and darkness", the world submerges in a deluge. The deluge seems to go on for ever and ever. And this opacity of darkness and sheets of water "through

which no sort of outline" is visible, produces in Nagaraj a crippling throwback to a childhood experience of a deluge in Malgudi during a freak monsoon, obliterating landmarks, and creating exactly the oppressive, deadening sense of an expanse of nothingness which he feels now, reading the Narada Purana, or what passes for it. And, to crown his misery, his notes, he finds, are an undecipherable jumble.

Nagaraj never succeeds in crossing the void, unlike his predecessors. Saroja comes back home, after her departure in a huff, with a bigger and louder harmonium, one that works with foot pedals. Nagaraj's world is shattered beyond repair now. He cannot escape from the truth any longer that Saroja and Tim are the new forces, the reigning realities, and that his perspectives, his ideals and tastes have no place in this new order.

In this realisation lies the elements of re-birth for Nagaraj. His encounter with the void is a chastening experience for him, one that forces a withdrawal. But it is liberative, nonetheless, for his illusions have gone. All the lumber of love and sentiment with which he had bound himself to Tim, and through him to youth and continuity, falls off him. He is a new man, the post-householder figure into which he has transited, like all the other Narayan heroes. Of course, there is no externalisation of the movement in consciousness that he makes, as with Srinivas or Jagan. Unlike them, he makes no physical, or psychical journey with strong physical symptoms, away from the scene of torment.

There is a stopping short here, into which, perhaps, more could be read. It could be seen as a decline in the agility of the earlier Narayan who could, with ease, chalk out a geographical counterpart of the mythical landscape in his mind. And this decline in agility, in turn, perhaps, is evidence of the wisdom that is greater than literary buoyancy, and which cannot enter the short cuts and easy logic of that buoyancy with the same cheerful lack of forethought and with existential innocence. The stopping short, thus, could be seen in a profounder light. There is one particular aspect of Nagaraj in this book, in fact, which lends support to his conjecture of some profounder growth. Nagaraj describes his daily ritual of pooja as "a daily death", familiarising him day by day with the eventual, inevitable happening waiting in the wings. Such a sentence has not been uttered by any Narayan hero before. The direct and casual reference to death and the overtones it has, of a change unconnected with motor activity, has surely some bearing on the absence of a physical movement forward in the awakening of Nagaraj.

The important point, however, is that the landscape in the mind has remained intact. The corruption is in the world outside, which

cannot take imprints of this landscape. Nagaraj retires into his inner world with a greater firmness, with more method. He will put cotton into his ears to shut out Saroja's singing. His world is not really shattered, not in the strict sense of the word. It has only been brought closer to the heart for safe custody.

Prophecy and Protest in Modern Telugu Poetry

C. Subba Rao

There is always an element of protest in prophecy although there may not be prophecy in mere protest. Would it be proper to suggest that protest raised to the level of poetry—inspired protest—becomes prophecy? The modern Telugu poet of the thirties had all the advantages of being the first to deviate from traditional metrical norms and introduced novel rhythmic strategies. The most impressive thing about the rhythmic strength of Sri Sri is the note of prophecy in the opening lines of *Mahaprasthanam*'s "Maro Prapancham" as also that of the concluding piece "Jagannathuni Rathachakral." The backdrop is the entire universe, the movement apocalyptic and the meaning cosmic.

From Sri Sri's millennial hope, utopian aspiration and prophetic vision to the assault on the establishment, the attack on the system and the protest of the Digambara poets there is a long way. Whereas lyric compression, economy of word and image mastery of assonance and rhyme characterise the prophetic tenor of Sri Sri, the latter generation of poets appear to depend on loose, unorganized, cataloguic verse paras in their run-on protests against the system. First or second, the two generations embody in their poetry unique oedipal struggles involving the search for the right word, inflection and voice.

Sri Sri's "Kavita, O kavita" is a programmatic piece comparable to great romantic poems in which the poet declares his intention to take up the *vocation* of poetry. It is an invocation to the Muse, a convention observed both in the east and the west, by the romantic as well as classical poets. It involves at once a trial, an attempt at self-definition, finally leading to the discovery of the poet's identity, his poetic *swadharma*. In the case of Sri Sri it looks as though his quest for swadharma forced him to explore Kala dharma, the zeitgeist. His creative response to Kala dharma leads him to the discovery of his poetic swadharma. The discovery is all the more valuable to the Telugu Muse because Sri Sri's encounter with the Western Muse, ideology etc. has acted as a catalyst in intensifying his search for an authentic voice. He was incubating, as it were, the spirit of the times as much as any one else in far flung Madras in the thirties. Small

wonder he is called the Vaitalika, the herald of the Modern Telugu Muse.

Inoculated by Western ideas, did he come to discard the jewelled phrase, the silky sentence, the *sayya*, the *paka*, so much a part of the conventional versifier and the stock-in-trade of the metrician? Single-handed he fought: fought within himself and withstood the seductions of the stereotypical Muse. Who else but Sri Sri could offer this advice to a budding writer in the forties? "If you want to write good Telugu, you better read English." How could anyone dismiss this as *anukarana*? It is indeed creative cross fertilization. Telugu is all the richer for this *samparka*, this encounter.

"Sensibility alters" we are told, "from generation to generation but only a man of genius could alter expression". Sri Sri brought about a language revolution first and foremost. His current language is heightened to the pitch of pure poetry. He knew the importance of 'purifying the dialect of the tribe.' And he also knew tradition in his bones—the entire thing reaching back to three thousand years as a simultaneous order in his mind. And he chose to deviate from it, and in this choice lies his achievement, his discovery of the poetic vocation.

Next we come to the content revolution effected by Sri Sri in modern Telugu poetry. His commitment to the common man, the insulted and the injured is completely *swadesi*. He dedicates his entire poetic tapas to the common man—the traveller betrayed, the beggar woman forlorn, etc. In him the mode of apprehension and the mode of expression conspire to produce poetry of a very high order. His poem on the beggar woman raises in very simple words a veritable conundrum about man's concern for another man. He is able to distil the still, sad, music of humanity in bare statement.

An old beggar woman

beside the path
beneath the tree
the old woman sat

moaning, unable to move against the swarming flies. Then we get the stark details—the glassy eyes shorn of light, the wrinkled skin, a corpse is better than this one, like a dead block of stone the old woman sat. Then comes this question:

If that old woman dies, whose sin is this? asks the mad wind

'Not mine, this sin' rolls along the used leaf. Nature here is amoral: animal nature selfish: human nature, indifferent. Not even indifference. human nature is shown to be utterly passive.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" shouted Cain in the scripture. The echoes have not died yet. Sri Sri's lyric is a grand understatement: muted but mysteriously suggestive. It contains a cosmic irony. *Upeksha*, indifference—there's the rub. It makes you an accessory

after the fact. It suggests that you are in deep complicity with whatever you are watching with objective sadness.

Far from being objective, *Upeksha* becomes a positive impediment to action. There are further questions. Is *upeksha* moral evil? Do we all suffer from it? Or is *upeksha* a petit bourgeois ailment? does it conceal a heartlessness, a lack of conscience?

An invitation to Mahaprasthanam is an invitation to overcome *upeksha*, the dichotomy between knowing and doing, knowledge and action.

That which moves and the mover
That which changes and the changer
That which awakens and fares forward
That is poetry for Sri Sri.

'Poetry makes nothing happen' is Auden's heartbreaking observation. Sri Sri's magnificent obsession is romantic in orientation. It offers a lyrical affirmation of man's innate capacity for change. Sri Sri's millennial hope informs every line of his 'Maroprancham' whose rhythm closely resembles that of 'Bhagovindam'. People who cite this fact seem to forget what revolution of the word Sri Sri wrought in the beckoning call of 'Maroprancham'. Protest in the hands of Sri Sri becomes poetry: and poetry acquires the ring of prophecy.

II

If Sri Sri was responding even as he was embodying the zeitgeist of the thirties, if we see him as the first born among modern Telugu poets and if we also find in him traces, assimilated quite successfully, of Shelley, Swinburne on the one hand and Pound and Eliot on the other, the Digambaras of the sixties appear as the indigenous counterparts of the Beat Poets and the Angry Young Men of the West. To say this is not to dismiss them as poets aping the Western Movements. The concerns, once again, are completely swadesi. That they could not sustain themselves as a movement for long—not longer than five or six years—is no argument against the value of their poetry. One cannot be expected to write long on apocalypse. A strain of ultimacy in all that they wrote strained their poetry in the end. But it would be unjust not to acknowledge their capacity for the unique image, incremental force of the verse para and an informing concern for the common and the human.

The structure of a Digambara poem is very simple. It is often a direct statement of the poet's dissatisfaction with the sorry scheme of things. The tone insistent, repetitive, playing variations on the

theme of corruption. A majority of poems catalogue a series of protests. In the West poets like Allen Ginsberg rediscovered the Whitmanesque tradition in their poetry, especially in the accumulation of details without much coherent organization to reinforce one's point. In the poem called *The Howl* Ginsberg begins:

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed
by madness, starving, hysterical, naked

and a seemingly endless succession of things by which the best minds have been destroyed follows. No doubt there is a lot of strengths in the images used in the catalogue. In the same fashion the Digambara do not care for organizing their poems in terms of a cohesive beginning, middle, and an end. After completing a poem, one wonders why the poet stopped where he did. He could have gone on without outraging our sense of the magnitude of a poem. Also the whole volume (although written by six different poets) could be taken as one poem without doing much damage to the individual poem. All the poets want to be anonymous not only by assuming pseudonyms but by writing in a manner which makes it difficult for the reader to look for a special voice and distinguish the voices. There is one voice and that is more often an indignant cry, an outrageous scream, a blasphemous grunt elaborated to the structure of a poem. This preference for anonymity implies a need for identification with all men, all breathing human beings in their struggle for life without respite. Both by their pseudonyms and by their style they want us to recognise their voice as our voice, as the voice of every man. Also names like Nagnamuni, Maha Swapna, Jwala Mukhi ideally agree with the tenor of their poetry. The names themselves are metaphors which control their poetry.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*

Criticism in Hindi : Acharya Ramchandra Shukla

B.N. Prasad

Ramchandra Shukla was called *Acharya* which is the Hindi equivalent of Professor. The title also refers to one who is interested in advancing the frontiers of knowledge. Shukla was an *acharya* in the true sense because he was the first Hindi literary critic to realise the necessity of evolving new critical standards to evaluate new creative efforts. This could be done by arriving at a fruitful synthesis of Western literary-critical theories and Sanskrit poetic and aesthetic theories.

Ramchandra Shukla was born in 1884 and died in 1940. He was also a creative writer and wrote some poems which successfully marry the word and the idea. Literary criticism, however, was the central field of his activities. His important works include *Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihas* (The History of Hindi Literature), *Rasa Mimansa* (The Analysis of Rasa Theory), and *Chintamani* (The Jewel of Meditation). The last one is a collection of essays on various psychological states and their literary implications. It also contains an elaborate critique of Croce's expressionist theories.

Ramchandra Shukla did not accept uncritically the poetic theories propounded by Bharata, Mammata, Kuntaka, Vamana, Anandavardhana, Abhinavagupta, etc. He was interested in the examination of their relevance in modern literary contexts. He made the ancient Indian literary theorists citizens of a rich literary-critical world inhabited also by the Western thinkers and artists like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Croce, Freud, Rupert Brooke, I.A. Richards, Emily Dickinson, the Imagists, Robert Graves, Laura Riding and Sacheverell Sitwell. The impressive array of the names mentioned above suggests Shukla's awareness that Hindi literary criticism needs a rich, dynamic and vibrant theoretical base. He believed that the ancient Indian poetic theories should be used to interpret modern poetry and drama and should be made part of the living tradition. He was also convinced that the Western literary thinkers were parts of a universal tradition, and should contribute to our understanding of literature.

Shukla believes that there is difference between poetry and great

poetry. Great poetry creates a sensibility which has the elements of freedom and bliss. It makes the readers forget the crude facts of mere existence and generates, through words, a state of total bliss. Shukla derives part of the terminology which describes poetic experience from religion. He says that great poetry should create the 'yoga of sensibility' (Bhava Yoga). It is equal in significance to the 'yoga of action' (Karma Yoga) and the 'yoga of knowledge' (Jnana Yoga). He is, however, convinced that great poetry does not give expression to paranormal experiences. It expresses experiences which can be rendered with concreteness, and with visual sharpness and clarity. He considers that a great poet surrenders his "I" in the act of poetic creation and merges his ego in the universal soul. Poetic language makes use of the words used by the common man but organises words in a special manner to make them vocal and expressive. Words in special patterns take the readers to the region of freedom and bliss. Great poetry presupposes an audience; it is never composed in an ivory tower. Experience and expression are united in a vocal dance of words. Shukla was a fierce opponent of the theory of art for art's sake. His ideal was Tulsidas, the writer of the Hindi epic *Ramacharita Manas*. Tulsi's poem has struck the vibrant chords in the psyche of countless men. It has made men shed their attachment to crude facts, and has a firm moral centre. A great poet cultivates the virtues of impersonality and objectivity. He is sensitive towards the manifested world. The poet is indifferent to the unknown, and is not interested in exploring the contours of mystery. The non-concrete experiences attract the attention of the philosopher and the theologian; they are irrelevant for poetic purposes. Shukla believes that the poetic ornaments (*Alankāras*), oblique expressions (*Vakrokti*), stylistic conventions (*Riti*) and ambiguity (*Dhwani*) are important for poetry but they should not attract attention to themselves. They are useful only if they have the capacity to create the state of bliss (the state of *Rasa*). The state of bliss is not the result of a mechanical operation of *bibhava-anubhava-sancharibhava* syndrome but should lead to universalization (*Sadharanikarana*). He criticizes Croce because he believes that the latter has analysed the expressive side of the poetic process while great poetry is the result of a unique bond between expression and experience.

Shukla believes that there are three kinds of poetry. Poetry which has the fidelity to experience but allows itself to be swamped by the uncontrolled novelty of expression (*Ukti-Vaichitrya*), belongs to the inferior class. Poetry which has the vacuity of experience and is interested only in the verbal pyrotechnics fails to take off and is forgotten by the readers when the novelty wears off. He discussed

Cummings in this context, and provided a translation and practical criticism of the American poet's "Sunset". He says that Cummings breaks the normal syntax, exploits the phonetic properties of words, and disturbs the grammatical sequence of words. All this dazzles the reader but contorts the poetic experience so much that the reader is unable to get any 'significance'. He calls Cummings a verbal juggler and feels that poetry of this kind fails to alter or enrich the sensibility of the *sahridaya*, the responsive recipient of poetry. Shukla accorded an inferior status to Cummings in the poetic world.

Shukla was one of the earliest of the Hindi critics to discuss in detail the characteristics of poetic language. *Rasa Mimamsa* which contains essays written in the early twenties, contains essays on the poetic language. At that time the stylistic studies of the poetic texts were not available even in English. Shukla has referred to the *Practical Criticism* by I.A. Richards in his book on Rasa theory but the reference is related to the social relevance of poetry. He quotes with approval the following from *Practical Criticism*:

There is no such gulf between poetry and life as over-literary persons sometimes suppose. There is no gap between our everyday emotional life and the material of poetry. The verbal expression of this life, at its finest, is forced to use the technique of poetry....If we do not live in consonance of good poetry, we must live in consonance with bad poetry. I do not see how we can avoid the conclusion that a general insensitivity to poetry does witness a low level of general imaginative life.

Shukla finds confirmation of his own beliefs in the words of I.A. Richards.

According to Shukla the language used by the poets is different from the language used by the people for common purposes. It is also different from the language used by the philosophers, scientists and other people interested in the communication of ideas. Here we find the germs of the later linguistic conception of *registers*. He says that the poet does not use in poetry 'class' words which are vague and can be applied in a wide variety of situations. The poet uses words which are unique due to greater expressive power. He is not satisfied with words which have literal meaning (*vachyārtha*) only. He must use words which are kinetic in nature and which present a sharp visual and auditory image. The 'definition' words, technical and scientific words, shall not be used in poetry because they make the poetic fabric vague. Shukla is severely critical of those Sanskrit and Hindi poetasters who use technical words used in medicine, Vedānta and logic for poetic purposes. Such poetasters are jugglers of words

and their poetry has no capacity to develop into real poetry.

Poetic language also exploits ambiguity, but its use should always reinforce the poet's *intention*. Attention should also be given to the syntax and order of words. Creation of music appeals to the auditory imagination and the poets should pay attention to this aspect of poetic creation. Rhyme, alliteration, internal rhyme, creation of rhythmic patterns increase the expressive power of poetic language. The poetic language should also take the poetic *occasion* into account.

These ideas about poetic language were expressed in 1922. Shukla shifted his position radically in the thirties. In his discussion of the poetic theories of Croce, he said that the poet's task was quest of the 'unique' and new combinations can lead him to bizarre poetic situations and the poet, therefore, should always be faithful to the common language. One of the reasons was that he was taken aback by the rising tide of Romanticism in Hindi poetry. The detractors of this poetic movement pejoratively called it *Chayawad* or the poetic movement which was in love with vagueness. The pillars of this poetic movement, Prasad, Pant and Nirala adopted this pejorative term with great aplomb. Their kind of poetry was radically different from the poetry of Tulsidas. Ramchandra Shukla considered Tulsidas's *Ramcharita Manas* an ideal poem and an example of great poetry. Shukla was unable to consider sympathetically the poetry of the *Chayawadi school of poetry*. He had already criticised unfavourably the poetry of Shelley and Keats in *Rasa Mimamsa*. Prasad, Pant and Nirala reminded him of the Romantic poets of English literature. They and their numerous followers gave poetic expression to a large variety of themes and their poetry created unique, new and rich linguistic patterns. Another noted Chayavadi poet, Mahadevi Verma, started exploring, in poetic terms, the zone of twilight experiences dominated by religion. Shukla was severely criticised for his insensitivity to the new poetic movement. He was supposed to be the Hindi version of Dr. Johnson, trying to stem the tide of the Romantic and 'meta-physical' kinds of poetry. The charge is not untrue but the fact remains that Shukla rescued Hindi criticism from the subjective charting of impressions, and gave it objectivity. He also wrote, though only at times, practical criticism. He also refused to repeat parrot-like, the poetic theories of Sanskrit literary critics and examined their relevance to the modern times. He also boldly examined the poetic theories of Western thinkers. His effort was truly stupendous and was never equalled by the critics who came to the Hindi literary scene after him.

They, however, added new dimensions of awareness to Hindi literary criticism. Hazari Prasad Dwiwedi who as the Director of the Hindi Bhawan, Shantiniketan had close contact with Rabindra Nath Tagore.

He did some uncovering of facts about the formative stages of Hindi poetry, and his work was of literary-archaeological interest. Rabindra Nath Tagore had translated the poems of Kabir, and Kshitimohan Sen, another Shantiniketan scholar had made a perceptive reading of medieval Hindi poetry and its social and literary significance. Both had influenced Dwiwedi deeply, and had given him awareness of new contexts. Here was a literary critic whose tools were sharpened by contact with the artists of another Indian language. Dr. Nagendra tried to present a synthesis of the *Rasa* theory of creativity and the psycho-analytic theories of Freud. His attempt was not very successful in producing a coherent theory but in his applied criticism he produced some perceptive studies of Hindi dramatists. Since he had taught English for ten years in a Delhi college he was aware of Euro-American literary theories like Symbolism and Imagism. He applied those principles in his studies of Hindi artists. Some critics made comparison of the words of Hindi literary artists with those written by Bharati, Narmad, Harinarayan Apte, K.M. Munshi, Sharat Chandra, Tagore and Bankim Chandra and their efforts tried to give Hindi literary criticism an all India dimension. Absolute standards of judgement, however, failed to evolve. It can be said, however, that Hindi criticism is more eclectic than derivative and the more important literary critics avoided the parrot-like repetition of European literary theories.

A great amount of critical energy was displayed by the literary critics associated with the progressive movement in Indian literature in the late thirties. The literary movement was an organic part of the political movement led by the Communist Party. This movement made people aware of Marxism and its view of literature in the social context. Much of the literary criticism written during this phase was derivative in nature. The names of Gorky, Pablo Neruda, Howard Fast, Richard Wright, Luis Aragon and Christopher Caudwell were paraded, often without discrimination, and with fierce polemical intent. During the late thirties and early forties, the Marxist critics of Hindi literature failed to evolve independent norms of literary judgement, and were, most of the time, content to toe the party line. However, the movement brought literary artists writing in Indian languages closer together and generated some kind of national awareness. Premchand established the Hindi magazine *Hans* (Swan) with the purpose of evolving an Indian literary personality and the magazine made available translations of works of almost all Indian languages. During this phase, most of the works in Hindi translation showed leftist leanings. Hindi literary criticism during this phase assumed a national character, and critical essays were written on Vallathol, Takazhi Shivashankar Pillai, Muhammad Basheer, Subhash

Mukhopadhyaya, etc. During the sixties and seventies, much of the polemical fervour of these literary critics was spent because there were cracks, and later on, formal splits in the international Communist movement. Writers like Rambilas Sharma and Shivdan Singh Chauhan became more balanced in this phase, and produced some brilliant application of vaguely leftist theories. It would be, however, correct to say that a Hindi version of George Lukacs has still to make his appearance.

It can be said that genuine literary criticism in Hindi has taken into account the authors and works which are really significant. Really informed literary critics try to rise above narrow prejudices and are often successful. There is one area which has not received the attention of Hindi literary critics, the area of Indian-English literature. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Nissim Ezekiel and Jayanta Mahapatra are simply wished away in Hindi literary circles as if they did not exist. They are supposed to have written for foreign audiences and are believed to have tenuous links with the Indian reality. The present author had surveyed the Indian-English literary scene in a series of three articles published by *Ajkal*, a Delhi based magazine in 1957. Since then no critical article on any aspect of Indian-English literature has appeared in any magazine. Articles, however, on the literary artists of other Indian languages have appeared in stray magazines. Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Akhilan, Anantamurti, Badal Sircar, 'Shankar' and Bimal appear at frequent intervals and it can be said that Hindi literary criticism has acquired in this sense an all India character.

Some disturbing trends have appeared in the last decade. One is the gradual extinction of literary magazines. Magazines like *Kalpana* published from Hyderabad ceased publication after playing a fruitful role in encouraging criticism and critical activity. Another is the burgeoning increase in the number of theses submitted to the Indian universities. The degree of Doctor of Philosophy has become a status symbol in our academic life and thesis-writers have crowded away the genuine literary critics. The third is the merciless invasion of commercialism of the literary field. Criticism is, in most cases a parade of sleek phrases and seldom displays the 'sacred fire'.

The paper circulated at the beginning of the seminar organized by Narasimhaiah contains a rather strange question: 'How would you proceed to set right the shortcomings?' I do not think any individual can set right the scheme of things obtaining today. A group of individuals centering around a literary magazine can resurrect the submerging critical standards. In this connection magazines like *The Literary Criterion* can play increasingly significant roles.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*.

Oriya in the Context of Indian Criticism

D.P. Pattanayak

In order to talk about a 'national critical scene' it is necessary to underline that India is not a nation in the Western sense of the term. It must also be recognised that India is a single culture area with defined geographical limits and has been so recognised from the dawn of history. The national critical scene in a multilingual country cannot be talked about without awareness of the regional. Regional without reflection of the national scene is bound to remain an aberration.

Criticism entails three factors, the composer (oral and written), the text and the receiver (listener/reader). In a multilingual country, where audience is defined by language use, an awareness of the functional diversity of language and languages is important on the part of the writer. In the absence of such awareness, the texts are bound to be composed in a single variety or a single language which becomes oppressive for the users of other varieties of the same language or users of different languages. Intimacy with traditions of many languages is not only the hall mark of modernity, but also a prerequisite in understanding the national critical scene.

When Sanskrit, Greek, Latin or Slavic became restricted to a limited coterie of connoisseurs and the literary product could not quench the aesthetic thirst of the masses, like the texts the criticism became irrelevant to the life of the masses even if they set high standards of excellence. Literature written in popular languages following the classical period succeeded to the extent they succeeded in merging the ages. The modern writer and the reader, estranged from the past because of scanty apprehension of tradition, isolated from the environment because of their linguistic insularity, find themselves engaged in the fruitless quest of a world vaguely familiar and yet completely unknown. Language and culture-sensitive contemporary man in every age must have sensed such contradictions standing on the crossroads of history.

The critic, who has inherited fragments of Western traditions, has been nurtured in a milieu where Westernisation is equated with modernisation, has persuaded himself that his own past represents a classic-

esoteric tradition, views life and literature with critical apparatus which ill fits the multicultural reality. Both the writer and the critic, disgusted with the world around them seek to create alternate realities, but end up in creating pale replicas of fragments of Western life and thought which are neither coherent nor integrative.

Fortunately, in the midst of such confusion in conflicting experiences, there are a few authors who stand out for their authenticity, centripetal vision, use of language which establishes direct relationship with the reader and use of an idiom which transcends the particular and attracts the attention of national and international authors and critics. In Oriya, Sitakanta Mahapatra is one such poet who through the concentrated use of Indian myths and symbols and imagery has created poems where many layers of meanings, experiences and realities are integrated into a complete symbol and capture the suffering of mankind in historical times through one sweep. Gopinath Mohanty is one of the most outstanding fiction writers who weaves a large canvas on a minimal story, where the hunting, harvesting, song, dance, festivities, rituals, love, hate, agony and ecstasy, dreams and realities of the tribal, the rural and urban are portrayed with equal competence. Manoranjan Das and Jagannath Prasad Das are two playwrights who not only have captured the 'complex human characters and complex involvement pattern of these characters in situations they live', but breaking many theatrical traditions successfully captured the loss of identity and loss of a viable centre in modern existence.

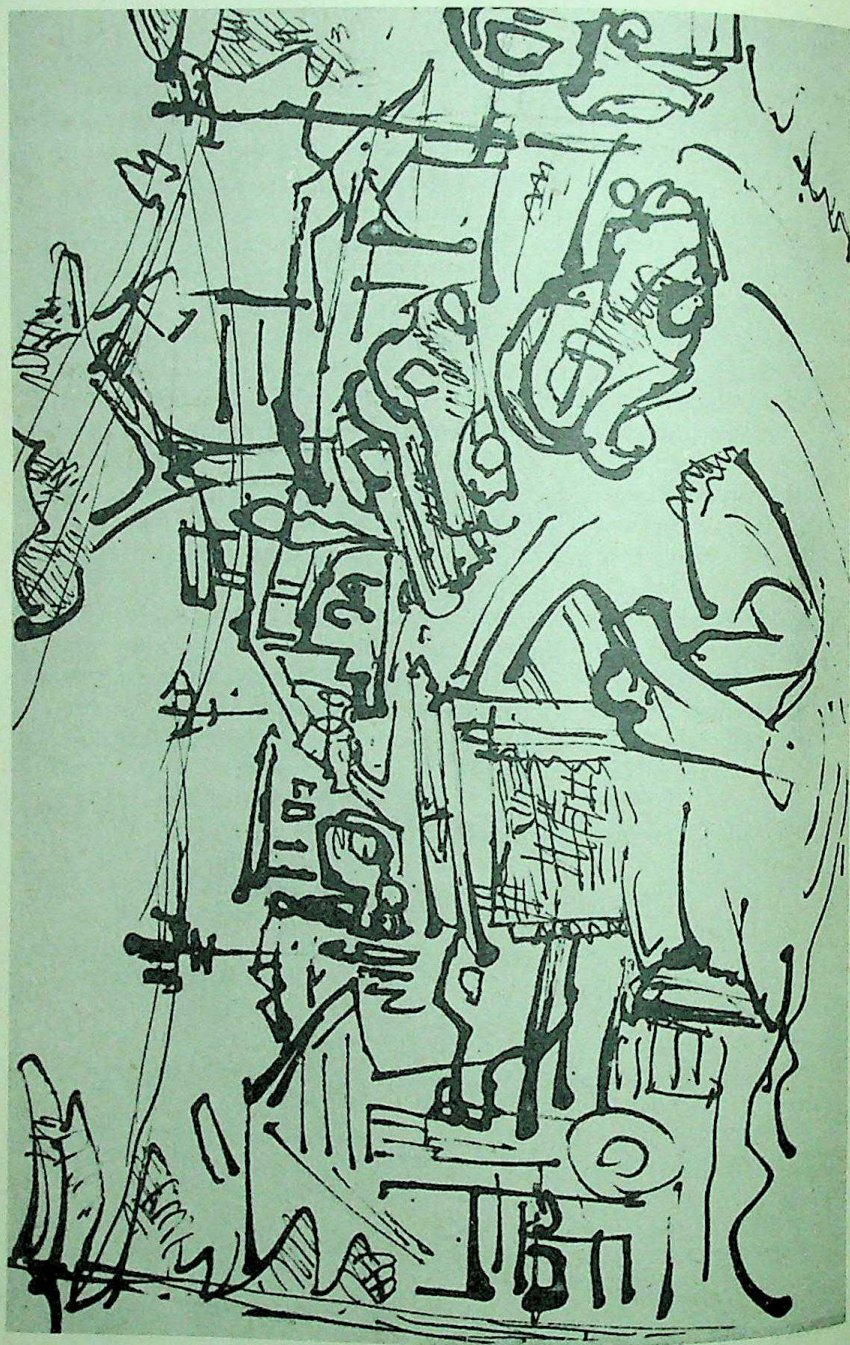
These writers are not aberrations in Oriya literature. In the making of modern Oriya literature sensibility, one could name Bhanuji Rao, Guru Prasad Mohanty, Ramakanta Rath in poetry, Surendra Mohanty and Kishori Charan Das in fiction, Bijoya Mishra and Biswajit Das in play writing. But all these faced rough weather at the hands of critics. Mayadhar Mansingh in his History of Oriya Literature condemned the moderns. Derivative critics eulogised them for their 'modernism'. Neither had a clear apprehension of the concept of modernity. If the role of the critic is to connect the particular, the regional and the universal in both expression and content, and set new standards of judgement, then one must admit that Oriya criticism is yet to come of age. The national critical scene does not appear to be much different.

The answer to the question if there is a climate for criticism in the country is in the negative. There are many reasons for this. Firstly, although none of the single Sanskrit theories has been employed fully to discuss an author, a genre or an era in any Indian literature, most teachers believe that they are stuck in the pattern set by Sanskrit. This is also true of English where the large majority of English teachers are still rooted in the Victorian criticism. Secondly, those who have

Western orientation have little rootedness in tradition and in their effort to work out a synthesis, they remain shallow in both. Thirdly, critics tend to fit regional data to the Psycho-analytical theory or Marxist theory of literature without critically examining their relevance. Last but not the least is the personality-centred criticism. Followers of important critics persuade themselves that their chosen masters have begun new eras and the eras also end with them. No wonder that under such circumstances, it is difficult to maintain objectivity.

It is said that in any profession, the bottom is crowded and there is always room at the top. The above picture excludes those exceptions at the top, who have tried to make a lonely furrow in a barren land. Thus a Narasimhaiah, a Kantaka or a few professors here and there in English criticism in India have made a mark and created climates favourable to research. In every Indian language, it is possible to identify one or two such names. J.M. Mohanty is one such name who has made significant contributions to Oriya criticism, even though in the last analysis his criticism also lacks depth in so far as it superficially acquaints one with the text without penetrating it. Trying to do too many things at once is one of the reasons for this. In Indian languages, explanatory notes provided by many of the new writers has also helped build a climate for critical approach. But self-introduction or inspired self-criticism is no substitute for informed criticism which is based on an understanding of the tradition and processes of change in any society.

Courtesy : *The Literary Criterion*.



Ajantrik

Subodh Ghosh

Bimal's taxi seemed ageless. Its longevity matched Bimal's unchanging obstinacy. The taxi was an old Ford. A prehistoric animal of a motor car, it bore all over its body, marks of ugly indigence. Unless one was driven by necessity or had never seen a motor car before, no passenger ever went anywhere near it. But although decrepit in appearance it was mighty in performance. It could easily do things beyond the capacity of bigger cars. When on dark rainy nights others dared not carry fares over the frightening broken forest roads of this mica country, only Bimal's hoary taxi was ready to go ahead without a trace of fear. Thus it was that it was engaged when the others had turned tail. Only then.

In the taxi stand among rows of young, gaudy new models Bimal's old Ford dozed like *Jatayu*, heavy with the burden of age. It really was an eyesore. With a patched up hood, a broken windscreen, a dented bonnet, bandaged wheels and dirty side-screens it was a sight. The footstand howled like a trodden dog every time one set foot on it. The seats were so smirched with smudges of engine oil that a well dressed person refused to sit on them even when implored. The doors were difficult to close and, once closed, difficult to open. As soon as one sat inside, Bimal's dirty towel, underwears and the oily, sticky shawl hanging by the rope strung across the hood rubbed against one's face.

The moment the distant roar of Bimal's car was heard each one of the rickshaws fearfully made for the farthest edge of the road. Even the most intrepid cyclists trembled when Bimal's speeding car passed them on the way. You could see it occasionally on a dark night at a distance. It looked like a one-eyed monster uttering shrill screams tearing down the road at you. You would of course know it was Bimal's car. One of the headlights had stopped burning. The body was loose in all its joints and it appeared that at any moment it might explode into a thousand fragments.

Bimal's taxi raised the biggest trail of dust, made the most ear-splitting noise and sent the buffaloes on the road into fits. And yet

no one dared say a word of criticism. If someone did, the reply came pat and sharp. "Don't you go for a shit? Don't you snort and shout? Don't you run? Then what's wrong with my car doing the same?"

Bimal's taxi was a butt of ridicule and called any number of names—the old horse, the lame duck, the blind buffalo and so on. Bimal also called it by a name, *Jagaddal*. For fifteen busy restless years in Bimal's life this mechanical animal has been his attendant, friend and provider. But did *Jagaddal*, one wondered, answer to Bimal's calls? It was difficult for others to comprehend that Bimal could instantly follow *Jagaddal*'s moods, turns of fancy and demands.

"Thirsty, aren't you? That's why the strenuous breathing, isn't it? Just a minute, just one minute." Bimal would park *Jagaddal* under the shade of a big, leafy tree by the roadside, get buckets of cold water from the well and pour it down the radiator. Making a gurgling sound *Jagaddal* would drink an enormous quantity, feel satisfied and then start again.

For fifteen uninterrupted years Bimal has been the owner and driver of the taxi. At one end of the taxi stand old *Jagaddal*, bearing the marks of penury and old age, waited patiently for a fare. By its side reclining on the smooth ash coloured bonnet of his new taxi, Piara Singh would have a crack at Bimal.

"Why don't you pension off your old woman, Bimal Babu?"

"Yes, and then go in like you for a painted new model whore", Bimal would promptly reply. It was useless talking any further, Piara Singh wisely decided. For, Bimal would then get angry and Bimal, once roused, could be wild.

Around the temple of the deity Nar Singh Dev, twelve miles from here, a fair is held on the full moon day in the month of *Kartik*. As usual, a bevy of passengers descended on the taxi stand and taxis drove away one after another with loads of fares. Only *Jagaddal* was left behind, alone and dozing in the empty stand. Who will want to come near this ruin with its antediluvian shape and primitive trappings?

Govinda came and said a few words in sympathy. "Well, Bimal Babu. No fare?"

"No".

"Then?"

"Then what? I'll have my own back in the evening. I'll take a double load, come what may."

"But how long can you go on like this? I'll tell you what. Send *Jagaddal* to the car exchange and get Maganlal's car from Jharia. A fine six cylinder sedan, believe me. Don't delay."

"Who's going to take all the trouble."

"You call that trouble and not this carrying overloads on the sly?"

"Oh, let go! come on, have a bidi."

Govinda stopped arguing further. It was better so. Otherwise Bimal might start mouthing obscenities. He never could tolerate others discussing *Jagaddal*.

Ignoring useless comments Bimal got jugfuls of water to wash the mud and the dirt from old *Jagaddal*'s body. He crawled under the car and, lying on his back, sprayed water vigourously. He examined carefully if the cowdung smudge on the neck of the tyrod was still there or not. He then started polishing the rotund tummy of the differential till it shone. Coming out and giving *Jagaddal* an all-over he looked at the two big, gaping holes in the worn out hood and muttered, "What can I do, *Jagaddal*. Please make do with the patches this season. If I get a few trips booked in advance during the pujas I'll get you a new rexin hood. Believe me, I will." It did not end there. Bringing out the last two anna bit from his pocket he bought kerosene oil with it and started removing the rust from the nuts and bolts.

Passing that way Gaur remarked. "Well, well, what's this Bimal Babu. A coat of whitewash on a dilapidated temple". Bimal got wild. His face distorted with rage, he burst out. "Get lost and fast, will you? Who has asked you to jabber?" Bimal could not understand why anyone should bother about his private affairs. "Private", Piara Singh broke out in guffaws of laughter. "Never knew a car could be a wife."

Bimal's business was in a bad way but he would not give up his obduracy. Apparently his perverse attachment to the old ugly car confused his business instincts. Otherwise why should he—an unpitying miser who fasted the whole day at Dhanbad because bread was dear there to return the next day and have a double feed at Gaya where bread was cheap—go on spending without a thought on the car? It was as good as throwing money down the drain. Reminds you of mad Bulaki who had a similar attachment for a broken tinny old pail. Bulaki would often hold his open umbrella over the pail while he got drenched in the rain.

It was evening and the place had grown semi-dark. A few shops lit up their petromax lamps. Puffs of thick smoke from the confectioners' oven spread all over the place and made it darker. The traffic constable, a short distance away, appeared inattentive. A group of villagers with bags and baggage were coming towards the stand, obviously intending to travel to some distant village. Here was a chance.

Bimal shouted in his loudspeaker voice, 'Come on, Come on. Ramgarh, Ranchi, Nayasarai, Makudganj, Chitrapur, Jhalda. Concession rate, concession'. The words 'concession rate' immediately registered with the intending passengers. But they are fourteen in

number! Bimal pushed all the fourteen of them, where normally there was room for only six, inside the cavernous stomach of old *Jagaddal*. No one from outside could say for sure how many lay concealed there, as in the tummy of a Kangaroo. Bimal gave a few quick turns to the starting handle, and *Jagaddal* roared like a lion. The bottles of coloured water in the betel leaf shop trembled and tinkled. With a delirious honking of the horn *Jagaddal* left the stand and disappeared down the road on the right like a burst of the nor'wester. The betel leaf shop keeper muttered. "Bimal Babu's taxi—fantastic!"

This was Bimal's daily routine. Of late, a suspicion that the entire world was in conspiracy against *Jagaddal* had become a conviction. He noticed with surprise that flying birds would invariably choose *Jagaddal* to leave their droppings on. Without hesitation the passersby would use *Jagaddal*'s body to wipe their fingers and rid them of the lime they had taken along with their *paan*. There were twenty seven other cars in the stand. But no one dared to treat them with such contempt. What had *Jagaddal* done to earn such enmity?

'*Jagaddal*', Bimal called softly, his voice gentle with emotion. How he wished his love protected *Jagaddal*, like a talisman, from the collective curse and the daily insults. "Never mind *Jagaddal*, you are here and I am here", Bimal declared in the reckless manner of throwing out a challenge and pulled hard at his bidi as if preparing for a battle. Whether because of inclement weather or breakdowns or repair work the other cars would occasionally be absent in the stand. But *Jagaddal* was always there as unfailingly as the sunrise. That could be the reason for the malevolence of other taxi drivers, or so Bimal believed. Which young man will not be envious if he finds a person who should be in dotage jumping and running about?

Bimal was full of justifiable pride about *Jagaddal* on this count. *Jagaddal* has been his constant companion, in joy and sorrow, in good days and bad, and had served him devotedly for the last fifteen years. Other devotees of god Nar Singh have so many things to ask of their god—fame, beauty and so forth. Bimal, as he placed his humble offering of a few flowers and a penny worth of jaggery, has only one prayer, one modest supplication—"Oh god, please see that *Jagaddal* is not incapacitated. Don't make me companionless in these my declining years'.

In the local Bengali club they say: "The chap is himself a machine. To be obsessed with a motor car night and day for fifteen years. No, it is not human".

The comment pleases Bimal who confesses to his addiction to the smell of burnt petrol. He laughs to himself and says, "Bengali Club is right. I am also a machine. What Bengali Club does not realise is

that *Jagaddal* is like a living being, almost human". In these days of ruthless and cut-throat competition it is old *Jagaddal* who earns for him at least a couple of rupees a day. And *Jagaddal*'s needs were so little. He could run twenty two miles on only one gallon of petrol. *Jagaddal* seemed to understand that Bimal was poor.

Like an Arab stallion *Jagaddal* was moving at an intoxicating speed on the road to Ranchi. Hurrah, for his breath, speed and capacity to carry loads. Bimal held hard the shuddering steering wheel with his hands, hugging it to his chest. He could feel the thrill of untamed *Jagaddal*'s vibrant heartbeats. The icy wind cut like a steel blade into his skin. Bimal pulled down the woollen muffler wrapped round his head to cover his ears. He was no longer young and the cold affected him badly.

The hill range loomed in front. How many times had *Jagaddal* crossed the winding, ascending road in the past, racing like an angry leopard, the entire stretch at one go. As he approached the foot of the hills Bimal pressed the accelerator hard with accustomed confidence. For fifty yards *Jagaddal* moved forward and then gave out a piteous groan. It was as if a few bones in his chest had got dislocated. His ears alert with anxiety, Bimal heard the groaning sound. There was no mistaking it. A disaster. The piston was broken.

A few days later a ball bearing melted as suddenly and damaged the engine. From then on something or other went wrong. No sooner was one mended than something else broke down. One day the fan belt tore apart; the next, petrol would not get to the carburettor; the day after the plugs went dead and the electricals short-circuited.

The solid ground of faith seemed at last shaken. For days Bimal was unnaturally gloomy. He became restless and was all over the place. There were breaks in *Jagaddal*'s routine as well; he was occasionally absent in the taxi stand. Bimal suffered shivers of anxiety. Will *Jagaddal* give up the ghost at last? "No. I am there *Jagaddal*. Don't worry. I will cure you and see you up and about", promised Bimal, the expert motor mechanic.

He placed orders and got from Calcutta genuine parts, a new battery, distributor, axle, pistons,—he got them all. He started spending recklessly. When he thought it necessary he sent wires to get the materials overnight. He worked at it late into the night—repairing, oiling, changing the parts. *Jagaddal* was stricken with disease. Bimal became almost mad. The money ran out and Bimal sold his watch, his utensils, and even the wooden cot.

Soon he had nothing left. No matter. *Jagaddal*, the faithful friend of fifteen years would surely be happy now and get well. It was some job done, wasn't it? A new hood, a coat of paint and varnish—

how gorgeous *Jagaddal* would look! Bimal's fancies took gleeful hold of his mind.

Before closing the garage doors at dead of night Bimal held up the lamp to have a look at *Jagaddal*. His eyes gleamed with joy. Days of tireless nursing and attendance had completely changed *Jagaddal*'s appearance. He looked like a powerful, muscular wrestler, ready to jump into the ring at a moment's notice.

Bimal washed and went to bed. The last few days had been a period of backbreaking toil. What a soothing comfort it was now to think that *Jagaddal* had recovered. Tomorrow Bimal would startle everybody with the blare of the new horn when he takes *Jagaddal* to the stand in the morning. They will be speechless with surprise and suffer again from pangs of jealousy.

Bimal woke up with a start. It was early morning and yet pitch dark. It was raining heavily. Bimal sat up, wide awake. Was *Jagaddal* getting drenched? The tin roof of the garage was old; who knows how many leaks and cracks were there? It will be a disaster if water somehow got into the engine. It will, besides, scar the new polish on the body.

Bimal lit a kerosene lamp and entered the garage. Oh, my God, he shouted. Rain water was coming down in torrents through a hole in the roof directly over the engine. Bimal ran back to his room and fetched his waterproof overall. He brought along the bedspread, blanket and bedsheet as well. After wiping the bonnet he spread the blanket on it and covered it with the overall. He draped the car with the bedspread and the bedsheet. He then got in and laid himself down on the soft seat. Cramped though he was it was immensely comfortable and his eyelids closed, heavy with sleep.

Next morning the people at the stand crowded round *Jagaddal* as if a miracle had happened. The vociferous admiring onlookers stood and saw the handiwork of Bimal's extraordinary mechanical talents. Bimal responded with drawn smiles a few times. The smiles appeared half-hearted as if clouded with a grey haze of apprehension.

But why? Bimal felt terribly depressed. *Jagaddal* was moving all right. But where was the loud announcement of power the moment the engine was started? What happened to the proud neighing and the speed of the wild antelope?

Bimal took *Jagaddal* to a field, away from the town and examined him carefully.

"Well now, come on *Jagaddal*. Spread, your wings like a *pakhiraj*." Bimal pressed the accelerator. It was no good. *Jagaddal* had become infirm. He tried on the gears one after another. At last he got wild. "Get going or I'll kick you".

Jagaddal chugged along, panting like a crippled old man at each step.

"The dumb swine, doesn't respond to care, doesn't understand affection, the inert wretch", Bimal shouted and actually kicked the clutch hard twice. The wild rage grew on him. He would find out the answer today once for all. Does *Jagaddal* want to stay with him or does he not? He had petted and pandered enough. No more.

In his anger Bimal, perhaps, lost his head. He pushed and rolled down seven or eight huge boulders. The shirt on his exhausted body became drenched in sweat. One by one he loaded the boulders in the car. Load? That was it, and *Jagaddal* will have to carry it today. Let us see if *Jagaddal* has the power or is finished for ever.

"Get going". *Jagaddal* got going but cried out with pain at each and every joint. It was too much. *Jagaddal* could no longer carry it.

At last Bimal knew the final answer. *Jagaddal* was in the grip of his death throes. No doubt about it. *Jagaddal*'s big heart was failing. King Yama had called up his name. Nothing can save him now. The darkness of night will now descend. Bimal had spent his last penny but could not save *Jagaddal*.

"I will now be alone", Bimal mused with infinite tiredness. "My days are also over. My hairs have turned grey, the veins all over the body grown wiry like earthworms. It cannot be very long now before panting and limping like *Jagaddal* I will have to make my exit."

Lighting a bidi Bimal kept staring at *Jagaddal* in silence, his mind restless with a gnawing sense of emptiness. "*Jagaddal* will go first and then it will be my turn. Goodbye, *Jagaddal*, good wishes go with you. You have fed and clothed me for a long enough time. What more could you do? It does not matter what happens to me now". In Bimal's eyes, forever dry and steely cold, came, as had never come before, drops of warm tears.

Returning to his lodgings Bimal stationed *Jagaddal* outside the garage. He went straight in without looking back and sat down in the courtyard with two bottles of *mohua* liquor.

He had just had his first sip when he heard Govinda calling him from outside. "Are you there, Bimal Babu". Govinda came in, a Marwari gentleman with him.

"Good evening, Babuji".

"Good evening. Which car are you an agent for?"

Govinda introduced him and said. "He is not a car agent. He has come from Calcutta to buy old iron junk. You have heaps of broken axels, wheel rims and such like. Why not get rid of them for a price?"

For a while Bimal stared at them with unblinking eyes. They appeared to him as an apparition of the future. They have come with a hunger that will not be denied. They are here with the begging bowl

in their outstretched hands demanding as alms his prize possession. Bimal understood all.

"Yes. I have old iron. Lots of them. What's the price you are offering?"

"Fourteen annas a maund, Babuji", the marwari replied eagerly. "War has broken out. Here's your chance. Sell out everything you have". "Yes, I will. That car of mine too, as junk. It has become useless."

Govinda was aghast. "What are you saying Bimal Babu?"

Bimal woke up from his drunken sleep when it was still dark. He drank another bottle and went off to sleep again. But his sleep was disturbed. He woke up several times to doze off again.

It was early morning. To Bimal's ears all the noise and the din of the outside world, now wide awake, were drowned by the only sound he could hear, the clank of the hammer. The Marwari businessman had sent his workmen early and they were fast breaking up the car.

Sorrow and drunkenness. *Jagaddal's* ribs were being taken out one by one. Bimal's consciousness was floating in some whirlpool of endless silence. It went down in a bottomless swirl and then, light of body, came up again to the surface. In between he could hear the unceasing hammer blows. It sounded to him as if they were digging a grave for dead and dismembered *Jagaddal*, and the clank clank was the sound of picks and shovels.

Translated from Bengali by Kironmoy Raha

Book Reviews

The Quilt and Other Stories by Ismat Chughtai (Translated by Tahira Naqvi and Syeda S. Hameed). Kali for Women, 1990; Pp. 226; Rs 70.

We need no excuse to publish and re-publish the fiction of Ismat Chughtai in her 75th year. Nevertheless Kali for Women's publication of 15 short stories by Chughtai is timely for several reasons. She acts as a social chronicler of her and our times, more particularly for Muslim women of Uttar Pradesh, Bombay and Hyderabad; she has been in danger of being forgotten by the non-Urdu reading public because she has not been sufficiently or fastidiously translated into English; and because a tribute is due to her as the innovator she once was, the craftsman she has always been and the social philosopher she has become.

The Quilt and Other Stories contains a total of 15 stories with a useful introduction by Tahira Naqvi, one of her two translators in this volume, and a glossary that some Indian and most foreign readers will need to enjoy the

whole flavour of these typically and idiosyncratically Chughtai stories.

To the uninitiated it may be important to know what Chughtai's literary influences once were. To us who have known her work since the forties, it is more interesting and instructive to know whom she, in her turn, has influenced. For, five decades ago, she was certainly an innovator. This was so less in form than in flavour, for Chughtai wrote candidly and fearlessly of what she had observed at a time when prudery ruled the writing of women. Her work is plainly realistic even when it deals with romantic situations. What is more, she lets nobody off easily, neither her own characters, nor the reader who dare not be squeamish when reading her.

It is a measure of how swiftly we have moved in the last 50 years that *The Quilt (Lihaaf)* no longer shocks or startles. The story is about lesbianism caused by a husband's neglect of his wife and told ostensibly by a child, but with the hindsight of an adult woman. The merit of the story lies primarily

in its claustrophobic atmosphere. This explains why the heroine does what she does. But Chughtai is not essentially a moralist. She neither accuses nor defends. When it first appeared in 1942 the story created a sensation that took its author into court to defend herself against the charge of obscenity. No one would dream of accusing her of anything comparable today, yet the story has lost little of its punch. There it is for the prudish or the liberal to make what they can of it. It is still extraordinarily eloquent, the more so perhaps because the child-narrator must be presumed to be innocent of its full implications.

There are other stories in the collection—not necessarily her best, for I miss *Tiny's Granny*—that deal with woman-man (in that order) sex relations. The characters in these stories may move up and down the social scale, be young nawabs or concubines or sweepers, men and women. They may be just ordinary girls and boys, men and women of the middle, middle class of India. But Chughtai's emphasis is almost invariably on the fact of the sex relationship and what each sex expects of the other. One is sometimes surprised to hear that Manto and she were not always friends, because they share the same angle on life: this is the focal point of the fiction of both writers. Also, they write with the same robust gusto, the same instinct to dwell on sexual

idiosyncrasy, to describe its crescendos and diminuendos. There is in both writers, for those who read between the lines, the virtue of compassion and the ability to identify themselves with their creations. Chughtai is, however, more successful in satire and, since practically all her stories deal with specifically women's issues, it is not difficult to see how much she has contributed to an understanding of just how victimised women have been, and can be, in the varied situations and social strata that they occupy in India.

Thus in *The Rock (Chatan)* interesting because it portrays a man and husband Bhaiya, of some individuality, the first wife, Bhabhi, is set aside by her husband for no better reason than that she has allowed her body to grow heavy and thick-set, while the girl next door, Shabnam, vivacious, supple and teasing is what Bhaiya requires at that stage of his life, an-enticing woman. Presently he marries Shabnam and, after a lapse of eight years, the second wife, who has grown to be "a ponderous mass" experiences what her predecessor did—her husband is diverted by an Egyptian dancer. He himself has in the meanwhile remained as erect as a sungod or a "rock", and considers himself a martyr. Clearly, Chughtai takes a different view of this easy exchange of life partners.

In *A Pair of Hands (Do Haat)*, a remarkably good story, the

heroine is a sweeper, "a dark, sultry temptress" a woman of easy virtue, who has a child by her husband's cousin while the husband, Ram Autar, is away fighting a war. People of a higher class who have observed all this, find that Ram Autar on his return is a complaisant husband and seek to rouse his ire by spelling out what has happened. Somewhat to their surprise, Ram Autar supported by his dominant mother, says: "When the child grows up he will help me. He will contribute his two hands and he will be my support in my old age." Chughtai's comment on this is distinctively hers: "Those hands were neither legitimate nor illegitimate; they were only hands, living hands that wash away filth from the face of this planet, that carry the weight of its aging."

Four other stories in this collection seem to me for different reasons to be well worth reading. *Kallu* shows democracy triumphant in India, for after independence, a servant boy achieves education and suitable employment, and returns to propose marriage to a daughter of the household in which he once worked. Everyone, including the haughty mistress of the house, accepts the inevitable. *A Morsel (Niwala)* is an interesting study of how a pleasant, committed nurse, Sarlaben, proves attractive to a man who travels to work on the same bus. She becomes a

habit, he looks forward to seeing her board the bus each morning. Her women friends unwisely "doll" her up in the hope that it will transform friendship into a proposal of marriage. The man, who seems monumental, fails to notice the glamorised Sarlaben when she climbs into the bus. Clearly he prefers his women unadorned.

Lingering Fragrance (Badan ki Khushboo) equally attractive, through rather long drawn-out, singles out the younger son of a Nawabi family, who grows to love the "maid" given him as concubine, sees her through childbirth, abandons his birthright and place in the sun to live with her, and seems content to do so. But perhaps the most moving story of all is *The Wedding Shroud (Chauthi ka Jora)* that ranks in my view with the title story for the conflicting emotions it rouses: compassion for girls, indignation with a society that allows them to live in hope of a wedding that inevitably eludes them. The tailoring establishment in which the story is laid is a miniature world that most of us will recognise as a familiar metaphor.

Chughtai's 15 stories have been written and published over several decades. Have they dated? I would say not much, because at base our society changes very slowly in such attitudes to marriage, birth, death and property. If I omit love, it is because of the word's

ambiguity—it means varied things to Indian women of different sub-cultures, experience and education. If the stories do suffer in English translation, it is from over-statement. One suspects that the original Urdu has an earthiness and a grittiness native to it, that cannot always be effectively rendered. For the same reason, they sometimes suffer from sentimentality, e.g. *Aunt Bichu* (*Bichu Phupi*). But perhaps the most serious criticism is one anticipated in the introduction: the narrow range within which the stories have their being.

Ismat Chughtai is always authentic and never lacks vitality. But the world she observes, despite the empathy and the irony that she brings to bear on its inhabitants, is, for 1990, relatively small and imposes upon her vitality the limitations inherent in it. A woman is still predominantly a sex object, and at the mercy of capricious men who act within the idiom of an accepted society. Chughtai may criticise this world, but she does not repudiate it. And in this lies her chief failing for our times as an imaginative writer.

Muriel Wasi

The Attic of Night by Anna Sujatha Mathai... Rupa and Co. 1991 (advance copy) 72 pages. Rs. 40.

This small collection of 39

poems can, in one sense, be pigeonholed—the poems are plainly the work of a woman, a modern Indian woman. The poems' range is circumscribed by the number and the quality of her experiences. She is—if we are to deduce her life story from the poems—neither young nor old; she is sensitive and has clearly the capacity to be hurt; she is given to looking back rather than forward; and though capable of passion, has learnt with experience to be prudent. In fact, the 30 poems are a private statement. They do not make pronouncements on the shape of world movements or, fortunately—since we now have a plethora of this sort of verse—on the environment.

But having said that, we ought also to say that it would be unfair to compare this small volume of sensitive but unpretentious poems with others in the same *genre*. Because the author is a woman and writes of a woman's continuing experiences, she is not necessarily like her 19th century counterparts, Emily Dickinson or Christina Rossetti, nor like modern women writers in a developed society. She writes of what she has known and knows, of what she has felt, and feels. And this, surely, is what makes the attraction of her work. It is both Indian and individual, and though in quality it would bear comparison with much work of good poets now writing in English,

and would stand out in India as the work of someone wholly at home in the English language, its individuality is among its essential virtues, and that which makes it poetry.

While we are still on the subject of levels of communication, we ought to say that some of these poems, though charmingly written and probably spontaneously conceived, could have done well in other literary forms e.g. the short story, the *recit*, or even the prose parable. In *Tiruvella*, to which I will allude again, is a case in point. It is easy to see this poem as an impressive sketch-cum-story of how an Indian family lives in the imagination and memory of one of its children. The "parables" are less moving. They occur in *Families*, a familiar story told in all countries of the world; also in *The Old*, a good theme, capable of more perceptive handling than Mathai gives it, for Homes for the Old are now an Indian institution.

But to the excellences of at least four of these generally good poems—I would choose *Light*, *Song of the Fall*, *In Tiruvella* and *The Last Supper* for special comment, and all four of them bear scrutiny as much for Ms. Mathai's native sensibility, as for the form in which she presents her work in free verse. It has rhythm but rarely even a half-rhyme, so we depend on her choice of words, that is generally good (though there is an occasional cliché that should have been edited)

and the atmosphere that the words generate.

Light is a short nostalgic lyric that describes the contour of a woman's life in India. It is not tragic, but it is touched with pain and occasionally invaded by anguish:

"When I was seventeen
And dreaming of distant lands,
And faraway loves,
My grandmother said
Get her married
before the light
goes out of her face.
The light in a woman's face
Should not be so brief....

Well, they got me married,
And put out the light,
But I learnt to live in candle-light
When the other lights went out....
"She who seeks light
Must learn to walk in the darkness
On her own road."

Perhaps this is not unique or so devastating (in a favourable sense) that the reader will remember it all her days, but it is a familiar life contour sensitively expressed, with economy and without marked self-pity.

There are similar strains in *Song of the Fall* in which a young girl at marriage leaves her parents' house and singles out the leaves of special trees as worthy of remembrance:

"Ordinary tree,
with ordinary leaves.
Father said,
'You're an ordinary flower,
You must fit in.'

One longs, if one is a woman-reader, to exclaim: "How like a Father!" A mother would not have said that. And, no doubt Ms. Mathai is using the gentle irony that women-poets have used to get their own back on men and life through the writing ages.

But the best of these familiar poems is *In Tiruvella*, that has all the atmosphere of a South Indian Syrian Christian family with its cohesion and continuity, its internal feuds and its external composure and seeming unity.

"My grandmother's grave has
no flowers upon it...
Often my sister and I would sit
On the black marble parapet
Of the verandah in that house
And suddenly notice
 grandmother's violent signals
 to us from behind the door....
We were growing up now,
 she reminded us.
And would soon be married,
 if we were lucky.
I asked my grandfather why
 girls can't do anything
My wonderful, kind grandfather
 comforted me, and said
Men would adore me when
 I grew up."

Later in the poem:

"She (grandmother) never loved
 his face as we did, dear kind
 old grandfather,
Yet it was he who helped her learn
 enough English to wade
 through the work of Dickens
 and Thackeray."

The story goes on, economic and holding its slender thread of poetry over a whispered prose-equivalent, to the grandfather's death—we have heard of the grandmother's grave in the poem's first line. She now reappears in a dream.

It is all so familiar, so Indian, so wholly acceptable, and Ms. Mathai has reason to be, if not proud of it, then at least content with it. The whole narrative has been spoken briefly, simply, authentically.

The Last Supper is a reminder—and there are several in these 39 poems—that the author is a Christian. She knows her New Testament and quotes from it, as she should, in household words that are also Biblical phrases, never putting a foot wrong. *This* last supper has four familiar people—her mother who says, as mothers do "Pass the salt"; her father, who says philosophically now." It's the time for forgetting", a character called 'A', and the author. "A", whoever he/she may be, questions life, and the poet replies, inadequately in my view, but then A's questions are imponderables, for who knows why life is as it is? I do not know that I can identify myself with Mathai's last lines in this poem:

"Suddenly I want to take the
whole world upon my lap
and kiss away its tears."

but if her aim is to recall the only
Last Supper worth remembering.

she has the right idea.

This small volume is well produced on good paper, with good printing (I found only one typographical mistake). Its cover alerts, even if it does not reveal the nature of its contents. One has a comforting feeling of care taken in production—this is still so rare in Indian editions of poetry, that it is worth recording. It makes it easy to read Ms. Mathai's 39 gentle poems, and to rise from their reading, a more sensitive human being.

Muriel Wasi

The Slate of Life—an anthology of stories by Indian Women. Kali for Women, 1990, pp. 163, Rs. 60.

By this time anyone who reads at all, and is interested in what an Indian woman's life is really like will recognise Kali for Women as the Indian counterpart of Virago, and therefore worth reading. *The Slate of Life* is, as its sub-title indicates, an anthology of stories by Indian women. There are ten of them in all, in chronological order in English (Kerala), and translations from Urdu, Oriya, Hindi, Malayalam, Punjabi, Tamil, Assamese, Gujarati and Bengali. They are all interesting for one reason or another, but are not of the same quality. The blurb on the backcover of the book tends to overestimate at least five of the

ten stories, but the other five, that are being commented on in this review, are well worth reading and remembering.

Grandmother's Letters by Meena Alexander has appeared earlier in Three Continents Press, Washington, but is seemingly new to Indian readers and is a remarkably good piece of work. If 'Grandmother' is in fact, and not merely in fiction, the author's grandmother, it would account in part for Alexander's talent, for the story has crisp directness and an economy in writing that is unusual in India. The letters that Grandmother wrote to her husband in the 1930s have all the charm of those more leisurely and idealistic times. Both wife and husband were freedom-fighters, involved in the Salt March and its consequence, and the wife had the many-sidedness of Indian women-patriots of the decade. This was patently a love marriage founded on a common allegiance. Though both spent years in British gaols, at different times, the wife's letters have the strength and the courage of her generation as well as its depth and constancy. The characters of wife and husband and their relations, friends and acquaintances come through with great vividness and realism—they are all very human and very credible. Patriotism does not diminish their fallible attractiveness. As a chronicle of the people and the times, this is among the most moving stories

that I have read, and I commend it to everyone, everywhere who would like to meet (if only in print) an enchanting woman who died before the author, her granddaughter, was born.

For quite other reasons *Dead-End* by Ajeet Cour, written originally in Punjabi, and translated by the author, is also fascinating. The story is laid in the Punjab and belongs to our own times. It deals with terrorism and a real live, wounded terrorist whom a young girl, the narrator, hides from the police. The girl has just had her brother, Kewal, killed by terrorists and is in no mood to love her brother's murderers, but the wounded boy, huddled in a basement room of her house is like a bleeding animal, grateful for any straw of humanity and touches the potential mother in the girl. She does what she can to feed and nurse him, to shield him, keep him alive and safe. When she knows for sure that the police are on the boy's tracks, she warns him. He escapes as much to save her as himself, only to die in next few minutes under police fire. The story has tones and overtones of heroism that are not overtly present in *Grandmother's Letters*. It is less subtle but its appeal is irresistible to anyone with an imagination.

Chudamani Raghavan's Tamil story *Counting the Flowers* is a tragi-comic commentary on how an Indian marriage is arranged in South India with the parties

to it, women and men, parents of the bride and groom, speaking their minds without much restraint. The story would gain by being dramatised; it has all the ingredients of social satire and the unexpected reaction of the groom adds to its comedy. However, it is plainly not intended to be undiluted comedy, for the girl, beautiful, but a school dropout, is obsessed throughout the premarital exchanges with counting the flowers on the nagalinga tree, that have a serpent like beauty, a metaphor that hangs ominously over the marriage settlement.

Two other stories *The Subordinate* from Malayalam by K. Saraswathi Amma and *Against Myself* from Hindi by Rajee Seth, point up the unhappy situation of Indian women of different strata of our society. *The Subordinate* is melodrama of a kind that does not, for that reason, challenge credibility, in which a sweeper-mother destroys her daughter rather than let her be exploited by an official whom her mother recognises as her former lover. The second is about a more usual conflict between a middle class husband and wife, the former a journalist, the latter a creative writer who finds that she cannot both write creatively, and be a good wife to her importunate husband.

Unexpectedly, the Bengali story *Aunty* by Bani Basu is the least good in the collection. Its canvas is far too peopled for a

short story; its characters mere symbols for the point of the story, which is the victimisation of 'Auntie' who has dedicated her life in service to generations of her ungrateful family. I was disappointed too in Dhiruben Patel's Gujarati *Crushed Flowers*, for she has written more poignant and memorable stories, but this has some of her usual sensitivity. *Hand-me-Downs* (Urdu) by Wajida Tabussum says what it has to say briskly but is, in my view, unimportant—Chughtai would have made much more of this not-unusual situation. *Lata* (Oriya) by Bina Mohanty has its moments as the victimised village girl stands up for herself and her child, but is by now an overworked theme. *The Offspring* (Assamese) by Indra Goswami is relevant but so uniformly depressing that one wonders why we cannot have, without necessarily conflicting with contemporary realism, a story in which there is some semblance of abiding ordinary human happiness.

Finally, the title of the collection is questionable. A 'slate' is an ambiguous article and, in one sense, is intended for writing that can be easily erased.

Muriel Wasi

Women in Colonial India, Essays on Survival, Work and the State edited by J. Krishnamurti, Oxford University Press, Delhi, Rs. 190.

Women studies have been gaining importance over a period of time. This is partly due to careful scrutiny of traditional myths about women and their actual status and role conflicts. But interest in the social and economic history of Indian women is relatively new. In our own country the interest has been partly due to the world-wide interest in the condition of women which dates back to the 1970's and partly due to the pioneering work of the Indian National Committee on the status of women.

The book under review is a specialised anthology within the larger framework of women's studies. It is specialised from another point of view in that it falls within the general sphere of socio-economic history. It operates within a specific time span, the colonial period, and has a limited geographical focus, India. Considering the fact that till now women-related subjects appeared only as a part of the more general work, the book seeks to achieve a major breakthrough.

The papers in this volume are many and diverse. All of them have been researched well within the limited data-base. They raise and tackle some of the important problems concerning women in colonial India. They seek to

enhance our knowledge of the role and place of women in our historical part. In doing so they have reduced the historical invisibility of women, which is an offshoot of the general cry of invisibility of women. Further, these papers still narrow their focus by studying the impact of laws, policies and socio-economic processes on women.

All the papers in this volume are diverse with very different approaches, therefore cannot be classified into one. However, a common thread that runs between all of them is that all of them look at the impact of socio-economic forces on women in the past. Yet, they relate to such diverse themes as working of labour markets and pick from social anthropology. While some stress increase of women's participation in politics and seek to examine 'its' impact on the traditional roles, others attempt to study the effect of technological changes on the women labour.

'Women in colonial India' is an important step in women's studies, but in this field many areas are still dark areas. For instance women's role relationships, the fashions linked to the social and economic conditions—Barring the data-constraint that all the papers suffer from and realising very well the ingenuity of the historian to sift out matter from the general data to put the spotlight on women's issues, one can say with confidence that the

book has started a new kind of history.

Manika Gupta

Kasi & Other Poems on places, persons and earth-fellows by Purasu Balakrishnan; The Institute of Commonwealth Studies & English Language; Rs. 40.

If the aim of a poet is to reveal the life within things and the soul within matter, Purasu Balakrishnan's poems in 'Kasi and other poems on places persons and Earth-fellows' is an apt realisation of this. His spontaneity of expression and a deep, conscious emotional awareness may best sum up Balakrishnan's virtues as a poet who has so effortlessly used the dynamics of the English language to bring alive the very essence of that vital 'Indianness' in his poems.

The book essentially comprises five sections and most of his poems could be linked together into an entity which is reflective of the unique vision and imagination of the poet.

In section I which is about poems on places, in particular the ones on Kasi, Udaipur, on seeing Ajanta and Ellora, Thirupati and Thiruvaiyar, bring out very lucidly the characteristic vitality of each town. In 'Kasi' the poet brings out the eternal nature of the city that shines with divine light, and evokes longings for a

certain tranquility and fulfillment of cherished desires of self-purification. In Udaipur whilst the poet vividly touches upon the grandeur and splendour of this 'Lake city' or the city of Dreams the following lines in his poem cannot conceal the tinge of disappointment in the poet's mind at having to accept a transition from the age old charm of peace, tranquility and romanticism that this splendid city offered to one of modern urban commercialisation.

"Where beauty and romance were now are drinking and eating and rupees and dollars from tourists and visitors, and they shout solicitously that you are lovely".

'On seeing Ajanta and Ellora' is yet another example of how the poet's masterful manipulation of words helps reveal the contrasting and dichotomous sides of our lives—

On the one hand, a momentary sense of such pleasure and well being at having to admire in bewilderment some very dextrous work of art by mankind, but on the other it's a return to the same stereotyped mechanical life where existence becomes a cliché like a game to be played over and over again.

Section 2 of the book deals with 'Poems on persons' wherein the poet has attempted to bring alive certain historical characters by paying rich tributes to them.

F.W. Bain is praised for re-

taining the richness, warmth and tenderness in many of his stories translated into English from some original manuscripts in Sanskrit.

Like-wise, Llewelyn Powys, Ramalinga and Kalidasa are each applauded for their simple but very touching pieces of poetry.

The heroic achievements of Sivaji, his intellectual and administrative abilities, sense of chivalry as also the tributes paid to Shah-jahan for eternalising the love for his beloved have also been brought out very vividly.

In the third section—'Poems on Earth Fellows', Balakrishnan reveals a philosophical bent of mind that is sensitive enough to perceive and feel the shock of tragedies taking place. In doing so, he manages to communicate a feeling to the heart. In particular his love and empathy towards living creatures comes through as a manifestation of the fragility and mortality of their conditions. In his poem 'The Hen' the following lines seem to so vividly describe that fragility borne often out of the unmindfulness and insensitivity of human beings to such living creatures.

Who cares?

If not under wheels then between strangling human hand or under the knife lay its end before its passage beneath the human palate between crunching human teeth.

On the following lines, in the poem 'The calf':

See the calf, on the road-side?

I saw it there yesterday and the day before yesterday on the same spot, eyes mid-way between open and closed, flies buzzing—a smoky pestilence—on its eyes, nostrils and face. It has been dying for three days now—its ears, insect-ridden, don't move.

Section four and five of the book relate to some translations made into English of poems originally written by the poet himself in Tamil as also a translation of a poem from the Sanskrit of Valmiki entitled 'Sita in the Ashoka Grove'.

It would appear that despite bold attempts by the poet at translation from Tamil and Sanskrit into English, there has been an inevitable dilution of the impact and effect that would otherwise have been discerned in the original versions of those poems.

A distinctive feature of this book is an addendum—'Notes on Poems' which certainly helps in a better understanding and appreciation of the various poems.

Manika Gupta

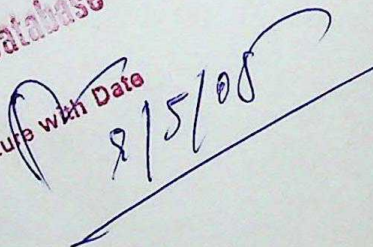
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